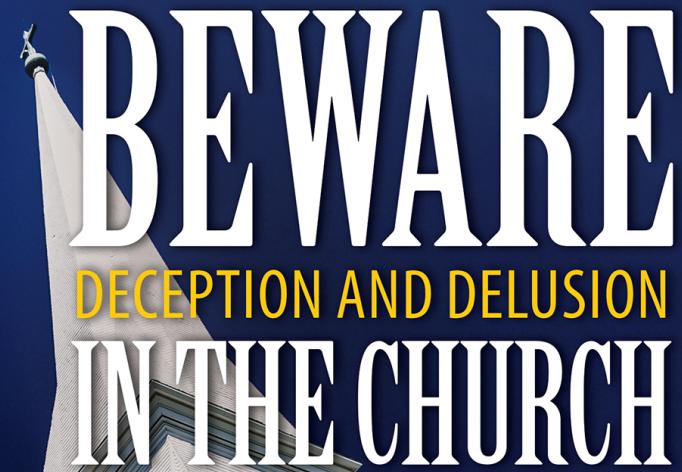


BEWARE DECEPTION AND DELUSION IN THE CHURCH

A photograph of a white wooden church building against a dark blue sky. The church features a steeple with a cross, arched windows with red shutters, and a gabled roof with decorative trim. The image is partially visible on the left and bottom edges of the book cover.

BILL RUDGE

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Beware—Deception and Delusion In the Church

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ISBN 978-1-889809-00-7

Cover design by Alpha Advertising

Typesetting by Pine Hill Graphics

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96-78378

Published by Living Truth Publishers

A Division of Bill Rudge Ministries, Inc.

Hermitage, Pennsylvania

www.billrudge.org

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Produced in the United States of America.

This book is the result of twenty years of personal research and investigation, thousands of hours in Scripture study, and hundreds of hours in prayer and fasting. My prayer is that you read this book with an open Bible and a heart that is truly sensitive and surrendered to the Spirit of God.

Bill Rudge

Contents

[Deception Is Running Rampant in the Church Today](#)

[“Love and Unity”—“Do not Judge”?](#)

[Counterfeit Christianity](#)

[Are Psychospiritual Techniques Biblical?](#)

[Is Positive Confession the Secret to Receiving God’s Blessing?](#)

[Is Much of Today’s “Prophesying,” in Reality, “Christianized Fortunetelling”?](#)

[Should Our Experience Go Beyond God’s Word?](#)

[Spiritual Addiction](#)

[False Signs and Miracles](#)

[Apostasy Now!—Coming Soon to a Church Near You](#)

[A Special Challenge to the Body of Christ](#)

[Notes](#)

[For More Information](#)

Deception Is Running Rampant in the Church Today

There is a strong delusion and dangerous deception infiltrating the church today. Many supposedly committed Christians are accepting counterfeit experiences and “miracles,” and are involving themselves in beliefs and practices that are not only unscriptural, but also originate in the occult and Eastern mysticism.

It's understandable when non-Christians who have blinded minds (2 Corinthians 4:4) and lack spiritual discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14) participate in such things, but when professing Christians become involved in this deception, especially Christian leaders who should know God's Word and have discernment, it is cause for concern. Jesus showed compassion to the masses and to those enslaved in sin, but was very strong in rebuking the scribes and the Pharisees who should have had spiritual discernment.

I Have Nothing to Gain

I have nothing to gain from writing a book like this. I make no personal profit from it. If I gain anything, it is increased opposition, spiritual warfare, and a possible loss of financial support. However, I must be obedient to the Lord no matter the cost. I can somewhat identify with Jeremiah who said:

I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. But if I say, “I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,” then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it. For I have heard the whispering of many, “Terror on every side! Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!” All my trusted friends, watching for my fall, say: “Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him and take our revenge on him.” But the Lord is with me like a dread champion; therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed, with an

everlasting disgrace that will not be forgotten (Jeremiah 20:7-11).

Building His Church

Before becoming a Christian, I had a great interest in Eastern religion, the occult, and New Age beliefs and practices. After my conversion, I researched and exposed them for many years. Now it is sad indeed to see supposed brothers and sisters in Christ embrace beliefs and practices from which the Lord rescued me.

The focus of my ministry is to emphasize what I stand for (Jesus Christ and Scripture), not what I am against. However, some people are so comfortable with the counterfeit that they reject the real thing. So, the false must be exposed and removed if people are to understand and accept genuine Biblical Christianity.

If a foundation other than Christ is laid, we must remove it before we can build on Christ—the true foundation of the church. If someone began building on the foundation of Christ but has fallen into beliefs or techniques contrary to Scripture, we must tear out the defective materials and replace them with materials of good quality.

Jeremiah 1:10 states:

See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

Deception in the Last Days

The main descriptive word of the last days is deception. Jesus warns about false prophets and false Christs in Matthew 24:5, 11, and 24. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 9-12, Paul cautions against “the apostasy and signs and false wonders.” In 1 Timothy 4:1, he warns about “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.” In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul reveals that there will be those who “will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” In Revelation 13:13-14, and 19:20, John informs

his readers that the inhabitants of the earth will be deceived because of the signs that the False Prophet performs in the presence of the Antichrist. The seduction of that deception will be so insidious in the last days, Jesus cautioned in Matthew 24:24, that if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived.

I see the elect, or those who profess to be the elect, involved in teachings, practices, and techniques of which the roots are Eastern mysticism and the occult. People are blindly accepting these false teachings that are erroneously defended by Scriptures quoted out of context. To these misguided Christians, it appears that Jesus Christ is being praised and exalted, and that benefits do result, albeit temporarily.

Today, while atheists and liberal theologians seek to undermine the authority of Scripture and redefine the Jesus of the Bible, many so-called committed Christians are allowing “new revelations” and “new teachings” that go beyond the Word of God.

Your Praise Is Empty and Meaningless

You can praise and exalt the Lord all you want with your mouth and raise your hands to worship Him, but if you are involved in phenomena and practices that are New Age in nature, your praise is empty and meaningless, and you have lost your discernment.

Isaiah 29:13-14 warns:

Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote, therefore...the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.”

They claim to be “free in the Spirit,” but are in reality bound to the teachings of men. They have become clones of those who have indoctrinated them in the current trends and phenomena. This results in worship, dance, testimonies, prophecies, and experiences that are an imitation of this conditioning. Jesus, quoting the prophet Isaiah, rebuked the religious leaders:

Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME” (Mark 7:6).

Witchcraft in the Church?

Many years ago, I warned about witchcraft infiltrating churches and seducing away immature Christians. In a newsletter article entitled, “Witchcraft Infiltrates Churches,” I revealed how several Christians had gotten involved with a woman who was involved in witchcraft and spiritualism.

The strategy of this woman, who professed to be a born-again, Spirit-filled Christian, was to infiltrate a church or ministry. She would quote extensively from Scripture, enabling her to subtly seduce immature Christians into occult philosophy and practices.

Far more subtle and harmful, however, is the fact that today many Christian leaders, obviously lacking scriptural knowledge and discernment, and ignorant of the occult and Eastern mysticism, are now the main offenders bringing it into the church.

Why All the Deception?

Before we examine some of these beliefs, practices, and techniques, here are a few reasons why deception is so rampant in the body of Christ today:

1. There is an obvious lack of consistent and concentrated Bible study.
2. Absence of discernment by many Christians and Christian leaders.
3. Scripture has been twisted to portray love and unity as the highest goal of the church. This extremism calls for unity at the cost of doctrinal purity.
4. The out-of-context and biblically unbalanced concept of “do not judge” makes it impossible to be a Berean (one who measures all things by the Scriptures).
5. There is a new and insatiable quest for more exciting spiritual experiences and “new revelations.” Many are allowing subjective feelings to determine their beliefs, rather than

evaluating all “spiritual experiences,” “prophecies,” and “new revelations” by the objective Word of God.

6. Many Christian leaders are unknowingly teaching beliefs and techniques that are New Age, Eastern, and occult in nature. They have learned them at seminars, conferences, conventions, and through reading so-called “Christian” books.
7. Some pastors are aware of the New Age and Eastern overtones in such practices as yoga and the martial arts but indifferently allow them in the church.
8. Other supposed Christians and Christian leaders, I am convinced, who have an agenda based on New Age and occult beliefs and practices, have infiltrated the church and are subtly seeking to indoctrinate the body of Christ.

Every Christian, and especially every Christian leader, has a responsibility to test all practices, revelations, and teachings by Scripture, and not merely to accept and propagate them because they are popular. If they would do this, they would see how these teachings are plainly contrary to God’s Word and Spirit.

“Love and Unity”—“Do not Judge”?

How Far Do We Go With “Love and Unity” and “Do not Judge”?

The Lord knows the church needs more love and unity (John 17:22-23; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 2:2). There is far too much backbiting, gossiping, division, and dissension. Church splits occur over the most ridiculous irrelevancies. We need to be unified in the true faith to guard against those who, in pride and lacking genuine love, take a strong stance on many non-crucial issues, causing needless harm to the body of Christ.

I will not, however, for the sake of love and unity, unite with those who propagate false doctrine that corrupts the foundation of Biblical Christianity. I will not involve myself in techniques and practices that I know to be of the occult or counterfeit, thus uniting with the very spirit of antichrist.

The God of the Bible who has been so faithful in my life, and who has supernaturally protected me and spared my life on numerous occasions, has not done so for me to proclaim an unscriptural message of compromise. I am compelled by His Word and Spirit to accurately and boldly proclaim His truth in love. That is exactly what I intend to do until I go home to be with Him or until He returns.

I refuse to compromise my commitment to Christ and His Word for the sake of man-made love and unity. God will have no more part of that than He did with the Tower of Babel, which He exposed as nothing but unified rebellion.

If God is a God who advocates love and unity at all costs, as some would have us believe, then why did He stop the building of the Tower of Babel? Why did He command Israel to maintain her separation from all the idolatry, occultism, and paganism going on around her? Why did He tell Moses to be sure His people made no covenant with the inhabitants of the land they were to possess (Exodus 34:12-16)? Why did He rebuke righteous King Jehoshaphat

of Judah and destroy his ships for making an alliance with wicked King Ahaziah of Israel (2 Chronicles 20:35-37)? Why did Zerubbabel and Jeshua refuse to allow their enemies (even though they said, “We, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him”) to have any part in helping them rebuild the temple but responded to them, “You have nothing in common with us” (Ezra 4:1-3)? Why did the Apostle John tell us not to receive into our house or even give a greeting to anyone who does not bring the true Gospel message (2 John 7-11)? Why did God tell His people to come out of Babylon the Great so as not to participate in her sins and receive of her plagues (Revelation 18:1-4)?

The Bible speaks of a new age of love, unity, peace, and prosperity after Christ returns to this earth to rule and reign. It repeatedly warns, however, that before the true millennium on earth and the new heavens and new earth, there will be a period of unprecedented false unity on a worldwide level culminating in unified worship, political power, and economic control. This occult-empowered system of delusion and oppression is referred to as Mystery Babylon.

The current false unity movement is rapidly moving toward merging apostate Christianity and New Age spirituality to achieve its ultimate goals of global unity, peace, and prosperity—without submission and obedience to the true Creator. These goals include such humanly appealing ideas as a worldwide celebration of joy, uninhibited licentiousness, cleansing the earth of all evil and divisive people, achieving individual godhood, and establishing God’s kingdom.

What appears on the surface to the undiscerning as a Christ-centered movement is in reality a satanically-inspired and demonically-driven movement. Revelation 13:8 gives the ultimate end of this counterfeit love and unity:

All who dwell on the earth will worship him [Antichrist], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Just Who Is Causing Division?

Many are quick to quote Romans 16:17 (out of context) about keeping away from those who cause division, but they conveniently leave out an important part of that verse. The total verse reads:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on [mark, watch out for] those who cause dissensions [divisions] and hindrances [stumblings] contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

Therefore, it is not those who cause division while standing for the truth of God's Word, but rather, we are to mark and turn away from those who cause division and hindrances because they are teaching things contrary to God's Word and luring people away from the truth.

Who is causing the real divisions in the body of Christ? Not those who are standing in love and biblical accuracy, who rebuke and correct those in error. Rather it is those who allow this New Age, occult-driven, antichrist spirit to infiltrate the church.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that...you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and this too, from God.”

Contend Earnestly for the Faith

In Philippians 1:16 Paul says, “... I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.” Jude 3 admonishes us to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”

The faith that I am proclaiming today is the same faith I have been proclaiming since giving my life to Jesus Christ in 1971. I have learned, adapted, and changed a few things here and there, but my basic message of Biblical Christianity stands firm. I am teaching the same biblical principles God taught me through His Word and Spirit many years ago. These principles have proven far superior to Eastern, occult, and New Age beliefs and techniques in enabling a person to reach their maximum potential in Christ.

No, I have not changed. These supposed brothers and sisters have changed. They have turned aside to the right or to the left (Deuteronomy 28:14; Joshua 1:7; 2 Kings 22:2) and forsaken their pure devotion to Christ and His Word. They have accepted “new teachings,” “new phenomena,” “new revelations,” and “new truth”—which go beyond and are contrary to the Word of God. They have involved themselves in groups, movements, beliefs, practices, and techniques that have compromised their commitment to Jesus Christ and brought an unholy mixture into the church (“the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons”—1 Corinthians 10:21). Many of them are, in reality, now proclaiming “another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit”—and multitudes who don’t know God’s Word and lack discernment are getting caught up in it.

Paul writes to the Galatians:

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough (Galatians 5:7-9).

1 John 2:18-19 admonishes:

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

2 John 7-11 warns:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

In the early days of my ministry, I rubbed shoulders with many Christian leaders, about whom I was uncertain. Their message wasn't blatantly unscriptural, but their experiences and beliefs caused me to wonder. I knew in my spirit that something was wrong; I just wasn't quite sure what it was. Years later as I matured in Christ and the knowledge of His Word, and as they progressed down the path of compromise, their teachings and techniques became visibly unbiblical. I realized why I had skirmishes with these people years earlier.

Will the Real Christianity Please Stand Up?

Today we are seeing Biblical Christianity (the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints by God's Word) being replaced by what I call "New Age Christianity." A whole new "Christianity" is being developed by those who embrace New Age philosophies and practices. They think it is the outpouring of God's Spirit—renewal, restoration, and revival. It is, however, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning apostasy and deception that Jesus, Paul, John, and Peter warned about and foretold would permeate the generation immediately preceding Christ's return.

The unity many are seeking to establish is not a unity based upon biblical truth. It is a unity built on tolerance of anything and everything, an agreement not to disagree, and based on subjective experiences.

While many "Christian" leaders distance themselves from committed Christians for being divisive or negative, they seemingly have no problem cozying up to those who propagate unbiblical beliefs and practices. Equally offensive are those who knowingly tolerate error so they can have financial gain, popularity, success, and prestige.

Unity at the expense of truth is apostasy. Israel's attempt to serve both Yahweh and Baal resulted in God's punishment. So, too, the church's unholy mix and spiritual adultery will eventually lead to God's judgment.

It is amazing how those who supposedly advocate love and unity become so unloving, vengeful, negative, and divisive when

opposed, exposed, or scripturally corrected. Some “Christians” are becoming spiritual terrorists by refusing to deal face-to-face with scriptural issues. Instead they covertly whisper, mutter, undermine, and twist the truth. Their surface appearance of love and being nonjudgmental quickly degenerates into hostility and verbal backstabbing.

Do Not Judge

While I was speaking to one of many such groups, the Lord strongly urged me to speak out against some of the false teachings they endorsed. At the conclusion I gave the following invitation to everyone: “If you have a disagreement, or if anything I have said is unscriptural, now is your opportunity to correct me publicly.” No one spoke.

I even told the leader I would be happy to meet with any pastor or representative from her group to scripturally evaluate these issues. Again, there was no response.

While several people did respond to the altar call and repented, the leader and some of the others who refused to do so—those who are so much against “judging” and so much in favor of “love and unity”—cowardly retaliated behind my back, attempting to discredit what I had said.

When the leader was later confronted by a member of the group, who reminded her of my public challenge, the leader made an excuse that she didn’t hear everything I said because for much of the time she had been “praying in the Spirit.” This is also unscriptural, because Scripture teaches us to examine all things carefully. I have witnessed Hare Krishna devotees do something similar when I shared the evidence and uniqueness of Jesus Christ with them. But never a committed Christian! This Christian leader was wrongly using “praying in the Spirit” in the same blocking manner as the Krishnas would use their chanting.

Ironically, these leaders, who after much prayer had concluded that the Lord directed them to ask me to speak, did not feel led of the Lord to accept the message He sent me to proclaim!

When I speak to such groups, it reminds me of Stephen (Acts 7:1-60) or Paul (Acts 22:1-23) who made their defense to the Jewish leaders. As long as they were reviewing the way God dealt with the Jews in the Old Testament or conveying their salvation experience, the Jewish leaders remained civil, because they were hearing what they wanted to hear. But, when Stephen or Paul gave words of correction from the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures for them personally, or said something that offended them, they became extremely hostile and wanted to kill them (Acts 7:51-54; 22:21-23).

So, too, when I share my testimony and some of the many miracles the Lord has done, they love it and listen intently. However, if I give a word of caution or warning concerning New Age and occult techniques and beliefs that are infiltrating the body of Christ or their need to repent of spiritual adultery, their countenance changes. An expression of hostility comes onto many of their faces. The atmosphere gets tense as they resist, stiffen their necks, and harden their hearts.

Allow me to point out a scriptural distinction here. When we are dealing with a personal problem between two Christians, or someone in sin, we should attempt to deal with it privately. If he does not receive it, then take one or two witnesses and in their presence confront him again, but if that person still refuses to listen, then we are to take it publicly before the church (Matthew 18:15-17).

On the other hand, there are numerous scriptural accounts of dealing with error and false teachings that should be dealt with publicly, since they are being openly proclaimed.

Beware of Wolves Dressed in Sheep's Clothing

To those of you who would say, "judge not," let me remind you that every time you speak out against abortion, pornography, child molestation, animal abuse, drugs and alcohol, politics, and so on, you are judging. To be wise and discerning, one must make sound judgments. So be consistent, and not hypocritical in your treatment of this subject.

The phrase, "do not judge," used in Matthew 7:1-5 is being twisted,

misinterpreted, and taken out of context. As a result, it is creating a dangerous environment that discourages biblical discernment.

Yet in this very chapter it tells us to “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). How can you identify wolves in sheep’s clothing unless you use discernment and judge their doctrine and fruit? How can we beware unless we evaluate them according to God’s Word?

If a “sheep” comes into the flock and begins biting, chewing, eating, and killing the other sheep, it doesn’t take much discernment to know this creature is not a sheep, but a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Many false teachers conceal themselves behind the smoke screen of “do not judge,” causing many believers and their shepherds to feel guilty about their God-ordained duty to discern and protect.

I have cautioned many pastors who were opening their churches to people and groups bringing in “new” teachings and practices in an attempt to generate spiritual renewal, excitement, and growth in their congregations. Almost every pastor who ignored the warning and continued had some initial gain but great long-term loss. Within months or years their flocks were fleeced and the church was either split or taken over. Several of these pastors had to move on to new churches—some left the ministry altogether. All because in their desire for growth and excitement they tolerated and accepted non-biblical teachings and practices.

Have You Been Spiritually Violated?

We are appalled at reports on the news of people who sit idly by watching someone on the street being raped or murdered without intervening, yet that same mentality has infiltrated the church. What this unbiblical attitude is really saying is: “Don’t confront people when they are in error. Don’t stand up for the truth. Don’t biblically evaluate teachings and practices. Don’t be a Berean. Don’t follow the example of Jesus and Paul and other New Testament writers. Don’t expose error. Don’t contend earnestly for the faith. Just flow along in the spirit of love, unity, convenience, compromise, and conformity.”

People are being spiritually raped today, and anyone who attempts to intervene or scripturally deal with the issues is labeled as unloving, gossiping, judging, attacking, witch-hunting, holding an inquisition, being negative, divisive, hurting the Body, being a Pharisee, being self-righteous, and the like. This mentality in the church today is really a spirit of fear, cowardice, and compromise. As a result, shepherds stand idly by while the wolves ravage the unsuspecting flock or indifferently tolerate unbiblical practices in their church.

Woe to you false shepherds who lead God's sheep astray, for one day you will stand before God to give an account for your compromising and cowardly behavior!

Who Really Troubles the Body?

“Compromising Christian leaders” imply that those who are exposing error in the church, who are standing uncompromisingly and boldly for biblical truth, and who are refusing to unite with their false teachings are “troubling the Body.” Their attitude reminds me of King Ahab whose sin brought judgment on Israel. When he saw Elijah, he asked accusingly, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17). Elijah responded, “I have not troubled Israel but you and your father’s house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:18).

I will not stand by as people are being spiritually raped, just as I would not stand by if your wife or your child was being raped or molested on the street. I would risk my life to save them as I have done before on numerous occasions when I intervened to help someone.

By God’s grace I will stand in integrity and commitment to the God of the Bible and intervene by boldly speaking out when I see people being spiritually raped.

Why This Book?

The motivation for writing the book you are now reading, first compiled in a condensed booklet version titled Beware—Deception

and Delusion in the Church in 1989, came as a result of confronting a pastor who spiritually raped many unsuspecting people during his ministry. Initially, almost fifty of his victims came to me for help concerning occult and New Age teachings and practices he had led them into. Many more have come forward over the years. They were deeply hurt and confused. Several were no longer even walking with the Lord. Fortunately, many of them are now growing in Christ in churches where genuine Biblical Christianity is being proclaimed.

In obedience to the Lord and after much prayer and fasting, I confronted this pastor alone—with restoration as my goal. Then I took two witnesses. When he still refused to repent and would not meet with his victims to scripturally deal with these issues, the Lord strongly impressed on my heart to write Beware—Deception and Delusion in the Church.

Little did I know when I first wrote the booklet in 1989, that it would have such an impact on so many lives. I thought I was merely dealing with a local situation, but quickly discovered these teachings and phenomena were affecting churches and ministries worldwide. The Lord later showed me that confronting this pastor was really the secondary issue. He was merely using that as motivation for the writing of this book. This has proven to be a warning, as well as both a great help and blessing to countless believers and leaders in the body of Christ throughout the world.

The person who had motivated the writing of the Beware booklet tried to dig up anything to discredit me and my ministry. He even contacted the pastor of the church I attended and those in leadership in the movement with whom I was credentialed. When he found nothing on me, he spread lies to divert attention from the real issues. However, the Lord gave me Psalm 37 (especially verses 1-13 and 32-34), where it speaks of waiting patiently and resting in Him because He will eventually bless those who trust in Him, but the wicked will wither like grass and be no more.

I know why this pastor refused to deal with these issues before the church; he knew that the teachings and techniques he was propagating were not only impossible to defend from Scripture, but were occult practices and New Age in nature. So, like a child

molester or rapist attempting to conceal a double life, this pastor attempted to hide behind a facade of legitimate Christianity. Instead of repenting, he used the “new revelations” and “false prophecies” of so-called prophets and apostles to give him opportunities to seduce and spiritually rape many more unsuspecting victims. Years later he fled his church in a self-induced scandal that rocked even his ardent followers.

When I initially wrote the Beware—Deception and Delusion in the Church booklet, I indicated that these false teachings and unbiblical phenomena would escalate in the Church. Unfortunately, this escalation of spiritual deception has proven to be accurate.

Warn God’s People

God is adamant throughout the Scriptures in His opposition toward those who lead His people astray. The responsibility of Christian leaders to be scripturally sound is of the utmost importance. Their eternal destiny, and that of their flocks, depends on it.

In Deuteronomy 13, for example, God calls for the death penalty to be administered to anyone who would lure away the people of God into following after other gods—even if the sign or wonder they gave came to pass. Rebellion against God’s Law was punished. If God would go to that extreme in the Old Testament, don’t you think He at least wants us today to stand up and challenge “Christian leaders” who are misguiding God’s people and enticing them into beliefs and techniques that are New Age and of the occult? We must warn God’s people, for they are being drawn away from pure devotion to Him.

As a teenager, I remember many guys who were so brave and tough when they were with their friends, but were wimps when they were alone. This is also true for many ministers and Christians who are twisting and perverting God’s Word. They are so brave and bold and confident when they are with their “support groups,” but so cowardly when alone. Although these people are publicly proclaiming their false teachings because they are popular, when challenged to scripturally deal with the issues, they are unwilling to do so. They know they cannot defend their unscriptural beliefs and involvements.

Jesus, Paul, and Others Spoke Out

Many books of the New Testament were written to expose false teachings and to encourage believers to obey and preserve sound doctrine.

Jesus, the Apostles Paul and John, and other New Testament writers repeatedly warned the people of God to beware of false prophets, teachers, and messiahs. They were not afraid to publicly speak out against them using biting rebukes and names, such as: “You brood of vipers” (Matthew 3:7; 12:34); “hypocrites,” “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27); “dogs,” “evil workers” (Philippians 3:2). Hymenaeus and Alexander are mentioned by name: “whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:20). Hymenaeus and Philetus are exposed specifically as “men who have gone astray from the truth” (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Of Demas it is said, “having loved this present world, [he] has deserted me” (2 Timothy 4:10); of Alexander the coppersmith, “[he] did me much harm” (2 Timothy 4:14); and of Diotrephes, “who loves to be first among them...unjustly accusing us with wicked words” (3 John 9-10).

Today’s wolves in sheep’s clothing cry out that public debate and exposure will hurt new Christians. Apollos, however, “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:28). It did not hurt anyone but the deceivers, for it is written, “he helped greatly those who had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27). As Charles Spurgeon has (and others have) written, “Darkness hates the light.”

The only ones who may be “hurt” are those who have built their lives on the false prophets and phenomena instead of on the Lord and His Word. Hopefully, it will “hurt” them enough to drive them to their knees to seek the Lord with all their hearts, and motivate them to get into His Word to “rightly divide the Word of Truth,” and walk in the genuine power of His Spirit.

Paul confronted Peter to his face (Galatians 2:11) for his compromising spirit and he did so publicly, before them all (Galatians 2:14).

In 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 the Apostle Paul states:

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Paul told Timothy:

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

Paul says in Galatians 6:1:

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

It's Time to Stand for the Truth

A well-known scripture on love is 1 Corinthians 13. However, there are more. Proverbs 3:12 says, "For whom the Lord loves He reproves...." First John 2:5 states, "whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected...." Second John 6 declares, "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments...." Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

We are living in a day and age when we must stand up not only with love, but also with courage and boldness to confront, expose, and seek to scripturally correct error. I have had to stand alone on many occasions against cultists, occultists, New Agers, and even supposed Christians who have distorted God's Word.

Jeremiah 1:17-19 (niv) encourages:

"Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight

against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

Over the years the Lord has led me to speak out in love concerning several teachings and groups. This resulted in much temporary uproar and opposition because many people were initially convinced I was totally wrong and out of line. In time, however, the Lord always vindicated me. Sometimes it was only a matter of weeks. Other times it took years, but the Lord has always been faithful, and the end result has been victory.

The difficulties, opposition, and spiritual warfare incurred have been worth it. Many of those involved in these various teachings and groups have eventually called, written, or come by the ministry center to inform me they have repented before the Lord, discontinued their involvement, and have renewed their desire to totally live for the Christ of the Bible and Biblical Christianity.

A Scriptural Perspective

People frequently ask my opinion about various pastors or churches. Although it is scripturally justifiable, I generally try not to take a position on a person or church, or mention names. Instead, I try to take a stance on teachings and techniques after evaluating them biblically. Then I seek to present a scriptural perspective. That is what we are going to do throughout the rest of this book.

Counterfeit Christianity

Most people are impressed by external appearances. They hear a dynamic speaker, view a touching presentation, see masses of enthralled and cheering people and blindly get caught up in the emotion and excitement of the moment and/or the movement.

The pages of history are laced with accounts of multitudes being led astray by charismatic personalities, supposedly new trends, and seemingly noble causes. The Hitler youth movement influenced a generation, changed a nation, and impacted the world.

One day a dynamic political leader and an influential religious leader will arise with deceptive motives. They will have great charisma, persuasive speech, hypnotizing words, miraculous powers, and incredible influence; but their true intents will be concealed with intrigue and deception. They will lead a world of undiscerning people down a path of global and eternal destruction. Our world is ripe for a world leader who will attain the role of Antichrist and a global religious leader who will actualize the position of False Prophet (Revelation 13).

It is imperative we look beyond the surface. Many times when the layers of glitz and glamour are peeled away, what remains is shockingly different from what was professed and presented. Whether it is a politician or a preacher, we need discernment.

Let me give you an example of how easy it is to get caught up in the hype and excitement of a cause or movement: As a teen in the late 1960s, I saw many get caught up in the race riots and rebellion against authority and the establishment without ever even considering why or where this movement was headed. Very few of us really thought about why we were involved or where it would lead. We just went with the flow of growing enthusiasm and joined the crowd for a dead-end ride.

The following are a few examples of how I learned as a new Christian about the fakery and hypocrisy that sometimes goes on in

the name of Christ:

- A popular evangelist who amazed young and old alike with Bible prophecy had a part in my coming to faith in Christ. A short time later he left his wife, ran off with his secretary, became an alcoholic, and embezzled ministry funds which resulted in prison time. Early experiences like this—that could have easily turned me back to the world—actually proved to be of profound benefit to my life and ministry. As a new Christian, I had a crucial choice to make: Do I build my life on fallible human beings or on God? I chose to build my life and ministry on Jesus Christ and His Word, and that has made all the difference. In stark contrast to that evangelist, two pastors who early on had significantly contributed to the growth of my relationship with Christ, faithfully served the Lord all the days of their lives. Their examples have been an inspiration to many.
- Then there was the popular Christian singing group who performed at a large camp meeting I attended as a young believer. They sang, cried, and moved many to tears with their songs, stories, and testimonies. I am not sure why I was never that impressed, but I am glad I was not. Shortly thereafter, this same group went secular and began performing some raunchy songs. It was hard for me at that time to understand how they could sing about Jesus with such passion, and so quickly turn, performing songs that led youth and adults down a path away from Him. It was not surprising to discover that even while on their Christian circuit, following their concerts, they had many illicit relations with girls and women who idolized them. As a young Christian I had to make yet another important decision: Will I be influenced by surface appearance and emotionalism and use my position of leadership for personal favors, or will I follow the path of wisdom and discernment? I chose to seek wisdom and discernment—and that has made a tremendous difference.
- As a young Christian I attended a large service by a famous female evangelist. There was an atmosphere of expectancy, but I felt it was more hype than Holy Spirit. Several people I was with dragged me up to the stage. They and hundreds of

people fell down as she breezed past or touched them on the forehead. After several touches—then pushes—on my head, I was the only one on stage, except her, left standing. I was open and hungry for everything of God, just not willing to follow the crowd blindly and succumb to peer pressure, wanting rather to keep my eyes and allegiance on Him.

Consequently, as a new convert, I quickly learned the importance of discernment and integrity. While I do believe in the supernatural power of God and have witnessed genuine miracles and heard authentic prophecies, I have witnessed much imitation, manipulation, even demonic phenomena. There is often too much “flesh” and “fraud” being propagated in Jesus’ name.

Too Many Fakes! So What Do We Do?

I could share many illustrations of faked healings, counterfeit miracles, false words from the Lord, erroneous prophecies, financial misappropriation, sexual immorality, drug and alcohol usage, and so on. Some of this could be explained as weakness of the flesh; however, many were using the name of Jesus for personal gain while fleecing the people of God who, because of their lack of discernment and biblical knowledge, enabled them to do so.

Does all the fakery and hypocrisy in Jesus’ name mean we ought to reject Him and Christianity? To the contrary, we should embrace Him all the more because God’s Word repeatedly warns about such people and practices. Be assured that those who resort to deception and manipulation will be held accountable for the Lord will “bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of human hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). It is utter foolishness to be a deceiver when it is certain that we will all give an account to God for our words, actions, and the motives of our hearts.

Many people have rejected Christianity because of fakery and hypocrisy; for some their’s was a lame excuse, for others a true stumbling block. Turning anyone from the Gospel or hindering someone in their walk with Christ because of our example is something we must all, as believers, strive to avoid. It will be beyond frightening to meet the Lord as a false or unfaithful servant. Hebrews 10:31 assures us, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the

hands of the living God.” Consider carefully: Where is there to go if one spurns the God who created us and His offer of salvation? Without a doubt, only Jesus Christ and Scripture have the answers to life and eternity.

While there are some who use the name of Christ for personal gain or to merchandise the Gospel, and others who are as deceived as the people who follow them, there are many genuine followers of Christ—pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and believers—who faithfully serve the Lord. Their beliefs and lifestyles—both in the public eye and behind the scenes—and the fruit of their ministries and personal sacrifices validate their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today We Need

What we need in this day and age—whether it is in religious circles or the political arena—is discernment and integrity. We must not be impressed, influenced, or seduced by mere words or surface appearance. Scripture encourages believers to be like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-12)—exercising discernment and examining all things by God’s Word.

In the midst of a corrupt and wicked world, an increasing number of believers desire to live committed and disciplined lives of truth and righteousness. Instead of “liberalism” they walk in obedience; rather than “legalism” they are motivated by love and a desire to honor their Lord. Not perfect in themselves, but relying on the grace of the Perfect One, they press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of them (Philippians 3:12). They will be found faithful when Christ returns and receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). How about you?

We need pastors and Christians today who will not entertain us but will delve into the Scriptures to make known the wonderful riches of God’s Word. We need those who will not resort to hype and sensationalism but will accurately and boldly proclaim the Word of God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We need those who do not have ulterior motives and agendas but will sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel the way our Lord and His disciples did.

We live at a time when each believer must choose to develop a close relationship with Jesus Christ, know the voice of His Spirit, obey the truth and principles of His Word, and walk in love, integrity, discernment, and discipline. Those who truly know the Lord and His Word will have wisdom and insight and will display strength during the challenging, chaotic, and corrupt days in which we live.

Are Psychospiritual Techniques Biblical?

Inner Healing, Visualization, Imaging...

Psychospiritual techniques are replacing the genuine transforming power of the Holy Spirit in many Christians' lives. Many supposed believers in Christ are accepting these spurious and inferior spiritual experiences instead of choosing to walk in obedience to God's Word and knowing the genuine power of His Holy Spirit.

Many people don't want to hear about repentance, commitment, obedience, discipline, and self-control. These biblical principles of spiritual growth are not quick and easy. They take time, effort, and dedication—and there is a cost.

Therefore, many look to some psychospiritual, New Age, or Eastern technique and try to Christianize it. But you can't Christianize these techniques. They are contrary to Scripture and often rooted in occultism.

God's way is far superior. I have obtained greater physical, emotional, and spiritual health through applying biblical principles than I ever did through any other means.

How Dangerous Is the New Age?

In an article entitled, "Escaping the New Age," author Paul McGuire answers the question, "How dangerous is the New Age?":

There are two great dangers. One is New Age thinking infiltrating the Christian church through things such as relaxation exercises, visualization, imaginary Jesuses, various forms of mind control, meditation and stress management. You see a lot of these things taught in Christian churches and much of it is occult influenced or Eastern mysticism-based... An equal danger is an over reactionary paranoia in the Christian culture where something is called New Age when it isn't.¹

Imagery and Visualization

What some people call imaging and visualization is nothing more than mentally picturing biblical accounts. What some people call inner healing is merely praying for forgiveness and healing of past hurts. What some people call meditation is nothing more than concentration and focusing one's attention on the principle or skill being taught. What some people call hypnosis is just relaxation or reinforcing Scripture. These are, for the most part, harmless, but unadvised, uses of New Age jargon.

Imaging and visualization in the true sense is the technique of actively forming a mental picture in the mind, with the intent of changing the material world or the spiritual realm. This technique is used extensively, but not exclusively, in the inner healing ministry. For example, one is first instructed to image or visualize a scene, a situation, a person, or a confrontation, and then to imagine Jesus entering the picture, where the scene is reenacted with Jesus healing all the particular scars incurred during that incident. One grave danger is that the Jesus imaged is not said to be an image, but the real Jesus, actually dialoguing with the person.

Johanna Michaelsen, who was deeply involved in the occult before becoming a Christian, states in her book, *Like Lambs to the Slaughter*:

There are perfectly valid and legitimate uses of the imagination... An artist "sees" the finished painting or sculpture in his mind or an architect "visualizes" the building he is working on... When we recall past events in our lives, we do so with mental images. Listening to a storyteller or reading a book can produce vivid mental images. When I studied theater, I mentally rehearsed my roles. Such envisioning is not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is a technique of creating an image in your mind and using that image in an effort to create or control reality through mind-powers.²

Entering the Realm of Sorcery

Many who practice guided imagery and visualization do subtle Scripture changes. For example, Romans 8:29, which speaks of "being changed into the image of Jesus," is twisted to "being changed into the Jesus we image."

While I am all for mentally rehearsing Scripture and using imagination for biblical accounts, I am against attempting to create physical or spiritual reality, or to cause mystical experiences through any mind technique. Any time you attempt to change, alter, or create reality, you are then entering the realm of sorcery.

When those who practice imagery and visualization believe that the Jesus being imaged in their minds is not just an image, but the real Jesus (even going so far as to dialogue and touch Him), then they have opened the door to counterfeit spirit guides.

You may think you are praying to the God of the Bible. Your motive might be right. But if your method is wrong, it can open you up to deception and familiar spirits.

You should never attempt to visualize or conjure Jesus or God the Father into the room with you as you pray. This opens your mind to a false entity that is a product of your imagination or an evil spirit disguising itself as the Holy Spirit, Jesus, God the Father, or an angelic being.

You might think you're focusing on Jesus. You might have a real spiritual experience. But, when you create Jesus in your mind, He is not the historic Jesus of the Bible. He is YOUR experience of that Jesus. The Bible warns about "another Jesus." Many adherents, through these techniques, have testified that the Jesus they encountered was not the resurrected Christ, but another Jesus, a counterfeit, "the angel of light" impersonating the Jesus of the Bible.

Long before it became a popular practice in Christian circles, Napoleon Hill wrote about imagery and visualization in his book, Think and Grow Rich. He writes:

The THIRTEENTH principle is known as the sixth sense, through which Infinite Intelligence may and will communicate voluntarily, without any effort from, or demands by, the individual... Step by step, through the preceding chapters, you have been led to this, the last principle. If you have mastered each of the preceding principles, you are now prepared to accept, without being skeptical, the stupendous claims made here...

Just before going to sleep at night, I would shut my eyes, and see, in my imagination, this group of men seated with me around my council table...

After some months of this nightly procedure, I was astounded by the discovery that these imaginary figures became apparently real.

Each of these nine men developed individual characteristics, which surprised me...

These meetings became so realistic that I became fearful of their consequences, and discontinued them for several months. The experiences were so uncanny, I was afraid if I continued them I would lose sight of the fact that the meetings were purely experiences of my imagination.³

In an article in the New Age Journal on “The Healing Power of Imagery,” a medical doctor shares many of the supposed benefits of imagery and visualization, but reveals that this New Age healing method is in reality “Old Age” occultism because you are encouraged to contact your inner advisor. He states:

After you’ve gotten comfortable with your imagery, you may want to explore it further, searching for new ways to support your self-healing. You may want to meet your inner advisor... Whatever you believe—that the adviser is a spirit, a guardian angel, a messenger from God, a hallucination, a communication from your right brain to your left, or a symbolic representation of inner wisdom—is all right. The fact is, no one knows what it is with any certainty. We can each decide for ourselves...

Sometimes people will encounter religious figures like Jesus, Moses, or Buddha, while others will find an angel, fairy, or leprechaun. People sometimes encounter the advisor as a light or a translucent spirit... The best way to work with this and any other imagery experience is just to let the figures be whatever they are. Welcome the advisor that comes and get to know it as it is.⁴

You’re Not Imaging the Real Jesus

A woman having problems with fear was introduced to

visualization and inner healing by a friend. They started with prayer as they held hands facing each other. Then the woman was told to visualize Jesus on the cross, but all she could visualize was the bottom of the cross and His legs. She quickly realized they were not the legs of Jesus, but those of her deceased father. So she was told to visualize a past traumatic experience with her father and picture Jesus there with her.

She got to the place where she was able to visualize “Jesus,” but he was at a distance, and since he was wearing a hood attached to his robe she was not able to see his face clearly. She was told to visualize him closer. As she did, he immediately became so close she could only see the white garments on his chest.

She was then told to visualize “Jesus” putting his arms around her and feel his love. She was told to wrap her arms around “Jesus.” She just could not bring herself to do so, even though that was what she really wanted. She did feel the sensation of “Jesus” arms being around her, but she still could not bring herself to put her arms around him. Being upset she asked herself, “If I love Jesus, why can’t I put my arms around him?” At that point, the telephone rang and the woman leading her through the visualization exercise answered it. Afterward, they were unable to reconnect to the vision, ending the session.

Over the next two weeks, she earnestly asked the Lord why she could not put her arms around “Jesus.” God strongly spoke to her heart, “That wasn’t Jesus!” She realized it was a demon masquerading as Jesus. She was even more fearful because she was concerned this encounter opened a door to demonic influence. Through seeking the Lord more, she again heard a gentle voice speaking to her heart, “No, you didn’t because you didn’t put your arms around the counterfeit “Jesus.” She realized God protected her with the interruption of the telephone call. She thanked God for His protection in her ignorance. She now seeks to know the real Jesus with all her heart through His Word and the Holy Spirit.

The Dangers of Inner Healing

Inner healing refers to the healing of one’s memories and hurts from the past, whether known or unknown. Inner healing involves visual

reconstruction of a past traumatic experience and then visualizing Jesus supposedly entering the situation, bringing His healing, love, comfort, and forgiveness.

Although we can all agree that God wants us to heal our hurts, bitterness, hate, and resentment, it is the technique or method used to obtain inner healing that we must consider. Such techniques as centering, imagery, and visualization are indeed potentially dangerous spiritually.

Consider the individual sent by her pastor for inner healing. The inner healers supposedly regressed the girl back to her mother's womb, and along with other lies, told her that her mother and father didn't want her. The next day the girl's eyes were swollen shut from crying. Not only can these experiences be potentially dangerous spiritually, but they can be emotionally damaging as well.

The "garbage" and "stench" of our past does not need to be dwelled on. It needs to be forgiven, crucified, and buried.

Philippians 3:13-14 says:

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

After I spoke at a Christian women's group, the president of the group told me how her "Christian" doctor, who is promoting holistic health, took her through a regression process during an inner healing session.

At first she told me it made her feel wonderful and helped her so much. As I questioned her, she informed me this supposed "Christian" doctor was also into yin and yang, along with Eastern and occult philosophies and techniques.

When I told her that she had submitted her mind to an occultist and involved herself in a New Age and occult technique, she recalled that she did think it strange that during this inner healing process

the first words that entered her mind were “Jesus Christ, You S.O.B!” She immediately renounced her involvement, and God gave her genuine peace and joy.

Most Christians Don’t Understand Occultism

If you had come to one of the soccer games I coached and saw the referee call “hands” or “offside” or give a team a “penalty kick,” you would be confused if you didn’t know the basic rules of soccer. Once you understand the rules of soccer, you can identify what’s happening on the field.

So too, if you understand basic occultism and Eastern mysticism, you can easily identify it when you begin to see it manifest in the church. Yet, many Christian leaders who have little or no understanding of the occult, Eastern mysticism, and the New Age ignorantly accept and propagate those beliefs and techniques.

Interestingly, while many researchers, as well as former occultists and New Agers who have become committed Christians, are speaking out against these activities, many Christian leaders who do not have a basic understanding of the source and origin of these techniques and beliefs are endorsing them.

Don Matzat, a long-time leader in the charismatic renewal, wrote a book entitled, *Inner Healing: Deliverance or Deception?* After thoroughly researching his subject, Matzat points out four basic truths about inner healing:

(1) inner healing is not based upon Scripture, but upon the psychological theories of atheist Sigmund Freud and occultist Carl Jung; (2) inner healing is contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture; (3) inner healing is not based on scientific truth, but theories of the subconscious mind; and (4) visualization, an element in inner healing, has nothing whatever to do with Christianity, but is an occult technique for reaching spirit guides.

The Deception of Centering (Meditation)

Centering, a euphemism for meditation, is the act of willfully moving oneself into a passive mental state by putting all thoughts

to rest. This practice may or may not involve breathing exercises and relaxation techniques. Centering (though it may not be labeled as such) is often used in Christian circles to engage in visualization.

One former New Ager who is now a committed believer in Christ told me after attending a seminar, which was being held in churches throughout the country, that he thought he was back in a New Age seminar. The seminar leaders were teaching a receptive audience of Christians about centering, visualization, sensing God's "active flow" within, having "SPIRIT-TO-SPIRIT encounters," "breaking through to the other side of silence," and many other occult and New Age principles and practices.

Many involved in Eastern, occult, and New Age beliefs erroneously use Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God" (nkjv) to support such techniques as meditation or centering. However, Scripture study will quickly reveal that "be still" literally means to stop striving or struggling, tremble no more, because the Lord is God. In other words, God wants us to completely rest in Him, in His provision for us, and in His love for us. "Be still" does not mean to put our minds in a neutral, passive mental state.

Don't Be Fooled by Hypnosis

"The word hypnosis is derived from the Greek word hypnos, meaning sleep...Hypnotism is a means of bringing on an artificial state of sleep...more accurate a state of reduced consciousness."⁵

I went to research a hypnotist who was speaking on a university campus. He was supposedly one of only four in the world who could do instant hypnosis on people. There was an exciting and energetic atmosphere in the auditorium that night. Many young and undiscerning Christians could easily walk in there and say, "Wow, this place is charged with the Spirit of God!"

As I looked around the auditorium, I recognized a Christian in the audience. When the hypnotist called for volunteers, this Christian went up, sat on the stage, and submitted his mind to a man who had just demonstrated fortunetelling, divination, telepathy, and other occult practices (although he didn't call them that).

Where was this Christian's discernment? Where was his obedience to God's Word?

The hypnotist began to tell people whom he could not hypnotize to leave the stage, and the first person he told to leave was this Christian. I believe God allowed that dismissal as his first warning and was protecting him in spite of his carelessness and foolishness. This person didn't heed that warning, for as soon as it was all over, he ran up to wait in line to see why this great hypnotist couldn't hypnotize him.

I believe the Lord sent me as his second warning. I went up and stood beside him and attempted to warn him of the potential danger of all this. I said, "What are you doing? This is occultism." He responded, "I don't worry about that stuff, I just read my Bible." I said, "Then you better read your Bible and see what it has to say about all this." He walked away a little irritated, but returned to me five minutes later when he overheard this hypnotist answering questions and discussing Tarot cards and other more obvious aspects of the occult.

Many were fooled because this hypnotist used scientific terminology, but his feats of mental and natural phenomena were a front for the occultism he was really promoting.

I received a personal interview with him after his program. He told me he considered himself a "good Christian" although he didn't believe in the Bible or that Jesus was the only way of salvation. I asked if he had ever considered the evidence for the uniqueness of Christ and the Bible, but he responded that he wasn't interested in that.

Although he wasn't open to considering that this phenomenon resulted from a demonic source, he told me he didn't really understand the source of his powers. "Maybe," he said, "it is from atomic energy or something like that," but he felt it was definitely beyond latent human powers.

He said he does not believe in occultism because that is supernaturalism, but he also told me palm reading, tea leaf reading, witchcraft, and so on can be beneficial to develop one's psychic

abilities. From talking to him and reading the literature he gave me, I discovered he is a parapsychologist, psychic, and mind reader. He uses telepathy, does levitation, and practices meditation.

A Deadly Mixture

A brochure I received advertising a Christian Hypnosis Counseling Center sounded good on the surface. It promised to help you lose weight, quit smoking, release stress, and the like. If you continued to read, however, you would discover their true occult overtones. The brochure stated, “Universal energy takes you into a journey as you meet your spiritual guides.”

This is the deadly mixture that is poisoning many Christians—terminology that sounds biblical or scientific causes many undiscerning believers to involve themselves in supposedly innocent techniques. They are subtly seduced away from pure devotion to Christ and His Word and are involved in imitation and counterfeit practices and experiences.

You may overcome your habit of smoking or gluttony through hypnosis, but do you know what often happens? A few days or weeks later some other problem manifests itself and another area of your life goes out of control. You keep succumbing to bad habits because you did not deal with the real problem, merely the symptom. God wants to get to the root cause, your need for discipline and self-control—which come only from obedience to His Word and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Occult experts John Weldon and Clifford Wilson write in their authoritative book, *Occult Shock and Psychic Forces*:

Our reasons for distrusting the use of hypnosis involve: (1) its possible similarity to the forbidden biblical practice of charming; (2) its historic origin to the occult in both the East (yoga) and West (Spiritist movement); (3) the fact that a wide variety of occult powers can be developed from hypnosis; (4) often past lives “pop-up” during standard hypnotic regression, even when there is no expectation or searching for them; (5) cases of possession that have resulted; (6) the will must be surrendered to another person; (7) a similarity to mediumistic trance states...⁶

Show Me in the Bible

Show me in Scripture where Jesus or Paul or anyone else used such techniques as hypnosis, visualization, imaging, or inner healing. You will not find them there. You will, however, find these techniques used in occultism.

Show me in God's Word where God's presence was attained or people had spiritual experiences through self-induced trances, visualization, imaging, or any other psychospiritual technique.

Visions or encounters with God in Scripture were not achieved through any techniques or self-induced methods, but through the divine intervention of a sovereign God (Genesis 15:1; 20:3; 31:24; 1 Kings 3:5; Daniel 10:1; Matthew 2:19; Acts 10:3; 16:9). That's why those who practice these techniques cannot give scriptural validation for their involvement.

There are new discoveries and inventions such as electricity and cars that Jesus and Paul didn't use. However, those are "physical" discoveries. I am talking about spiritual experiences. Jesus is God incarnate, the light of the world who came to show us the truth. Paul wrote much of the New Testament. If there were genuine techniques to bring us spiritual experiences and reality with our Creator, then Jesus Christ or Paul would surely have taught them to us. They didn't because these are counterfeit, occult techniques which would give us imitation and inferior spiritual experiences.

Many years ago, during my research of health and fitness, I was introduced to visualization techniques for healing. It seemed innocent enough and didn't appear to violate any biblical principles. Besides, it was recommended in a Christian book I was reading by an author I respected. As I closed my eyes and relaxed I began to create a mental image of being healthy. I visualized my body being healed and totally healthy. But I knew something was wrong and felt God's Spirit saying, "I do not want you doing this." I was obedient to God's Spirit and did not continue.

Shortly after that, I saw the film, *Gods of the New Age*, which revealed the occult and Eastern roots of this technique and confirmed what the Spirit was speaking to my heart. Because I had

discernment and was determined to wholeheartedly follow the Lord, He protected me from something that could have jeopardized my walk with Him had I continued.

According to the Omega Letter, Michael Harner, a leading anthropologist (who endorses these New Age techniques), explained in his book, *The Way of the Shaman*:

Shaman is a word that anthropologists have adopted universally for what we used to call witch-doctors, medicine men, psychics, wizards, voodoo priests and so forth. It's witchcraft in other words... If you want to know what holistic medicine is, basically, it's simply a revival of witchcraft in the western world under new terms such as: visualization, aspects of psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, positive expressions for health and healing, positive confession, positive thinking. These all come out of witchcraft. They've been practiced all around the world and you will find them in every culture on the face of this earth associated with shamanism. And now we are accepting them in the modern world under new terms...⁷

Always Keep Your Mind on Guard

Years ago I did extensive biblical research on spiritual warfare. I learned our minds are the spiritual battleground. No wonder God tells us to keep our minds on guard and protected. Putting our minds in a passive or neutral mental state is a doorway and steppingstone to the occult and opens us up to contact with spirit guides and familiar spirits (demonic entities).

James 4:7 says, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Paul states in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Our minds need to be submitted to and controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ. In biblical meditation, our minds are filled with Scripture

and are actively dwelling (like a cow chewing its cud) on God's Word.

The Mind Is a Spiritual Battleground

The mind is a spiritual battleground where demonic activity, control, and manipulation can occur. Second Corinthians 4:4 informs us that, "The god of this world," referring to Satan, "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

So if Satan, according to Revelation 13:7-8, is going to control the world, and if according to the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, God is going to send a strong delusion so that those who do not love the truth will believe the lie, how will this happen? Through the mind.

Consider all the mind-altering and hallucinogenic drugs, painkiller medications, occult movies and cartoons, yoga, meditation, hypnosis, psychospiritual techniques, hyper-worship, ecstatic music, mind-expansion techniques, out-of-body experiences, and the many other methods and phenomena to put people into trancelike states or achieve altered states of consciousness. These are all ways to put your mind (the spiritual battleground) in a neutral, passive, nonresistant, and receptive mental state. In this state one can easily have thoughts implanted and be vulnerable to demonic manifestations and phenomena.

The world and even many Christians are being conditioned and programmed for a mass brainwashing and the greatest deception humankind has ever seen—the ultimate delusion prophesied in Scripture (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

Conscious Breathing Class

The purpose of the following illustration is twofold. First, to reveal and warn how many Christians are participating in spiritually dangerous occult techniques or "Christianized" versions. Second, it is to motivate you to take advantage of opportunities to share your faith in Christ during potential witness encounters.

My wife Karen and I attended a two-week session at a health institute in Southern California. We knew the class on Conscious Breathing was going to be tainted with New Age techniques and beliefs, so Karen decided not to go. I looked at it as a research and witness opportunity. The instructor of this deep breathing class began by requesting everyone to close their eyes and hum a tone while punching the air to set the mood. Through “toning,” practitioners learn to build up vibrations within the body as they hum and chant. The mystical connotations of sound, deep breathing, visualization, meditation, and energy flow were intended by the instructor to find application in holistic health treatment.

When I was the only one not participating, the instructor stopped the session and announced that everyone must participate. The toning and punching the air resumed but was abruptly stopped as the instructor asked if I was going to participate. With all eyes glaring at me, I told her that I would only do the breathing part. The instructor talked to me during a break, and I explained to her that it would be like her going to a fast food restaurant. She would have to be very selective in the choices she made so as not to violate her convictions. Besides, it would be a regression for her to consume what she believed to be inferior and potentially harmful food. I explained to her that in my spiritual walk, this is a regression.

The session resumed with about twenty-five people punching and dancing wildly while chanting tones, deep breathing, and saying positive affirmations. An audio-tape played for ninety minutes with music, toning, and such affirmations as: “You are beautiful,” “You are whole,” “You are divine,” and “We are all children of God.” While toning, deep breathing, and listening to the positive affirmations, participants were also told to visualize different colors as they visualized energy moving through the chakras. (In Hinduism, chakras are literally wheels or lotuses in the body which are emotional or spiritual centers, providing psychic information and energy. Chakras are the spiritual nerve center from the base of the spine to the crown of the head through which various energies, including the universal life force, are received, transformed, and distributed.)

During the session, the instructor twice invoked the gods of all who were there and also did an invocation for the masters of wisdom, inner guide, or whatever you believe the “mystery” to be. I felt like Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon. I was in an occult environment and inundated with their belief system. I responded in my mind to each affirmation with a biblical response. Now, I would not recommend any believer do what I did, but I prayed before attending this class and believed the Lord wanted me to see the influence many Christians are coming under and submitting to so I could both warn them and assure them of the superior power of God’s Spirit and Word.

I was amazed at the number of people who, while participating in some blatant occult practices during the two weeks we were there, were professing Christians who should have had discernment and known better. Several attended Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Near the end of this Conscious Breathing session one woman said, “I am a Christian and this just reaffirmed everything I believe.” Another professing Christian woman enthusiastically participated in everything offered during the session. When it ended, she was smiling as if she had just seen Jesus. Another woman commented that her deceased grandmother was in the room with her during this.

Immediately following the session several people came up to me and wanted to know why I would not participate. They listened intently for almost an hour as I shared my testimony of coming to know Jesus Christ and what He has done in my life. I then gave them copies of my Spiritual Warfare and Victory in Christ and Who Is This Jesus? books for further explanation. A Jewish woman who also asked me why I would not participate listened intently as I shared how I searched for and found the Jewish Messiah, and what her Hebrew Bible teaches concerning such occult involvement. She graciously received a copy of Who Is This Jesus?

I also attended a class on Advanced Alpha Techniques. It was taught by the same instructor who taught the Conscious Breathing class. Again I did not participate in the techniques, but merely listened to the lectures.

Following this session the instructor had each of us share

something. Most participants told how stressed they were and their need to be in “alpha,” a meditative, relaxed state. As my turn neared, I asked the Lord for wisdom concerning what to share. I told them I run a nonprofit organization that is often adventurous and challenging, involving extreme stress at times, but that I have tremendous peace in the midst of it from my relationship with Jesus Christ.

After class, a woman approached me and said, “I need to talk to you.” She told me she was a Christian and wanted to know how to sort this all out and what she could do to have the peace of the Lord. We had a long and fruitful conversation.

The next morning another woman approached me. She said she was Jewish and was greatly inspired by what I shared yesterday. She said she called her daughter after class to tell her what I said. Her daughter had just started a business in New York City and had several near disasters causing her to believe her new business was going to fail. She told me that what I shared in class greatly encouraged her daughter. I informed her I had been to Jerusalem many times and had a staff member who was a messianic believer. We had a good conversation and then parted because exercise class was beginning.

Many of the people attending these sessions were professing Christians indulging in all the New Age revelry. Other participants were seekers looking for new spiritual light and experiences. Some were hostile to Jesus Christ and offended by anything Christian.

As true believers in Jesus Christ living in a growing pagan society, we must be light in the midst of darkness and salt that has not become tasteless without compromising our biblical convictions. Having this “balance” may be a challenge in this day and age, but it is tremendously crucial.

Venice Beach Experiences

Venice Beach in Southern California was known as Muscle Beach in the 1960s. It was the place all my weight lifting buddies and I dreamed of going when we were teens. A few years ago, while ministering in California, I had the opportunity to visit Venice

Beach with two of my nephews who lived in Southern California.

As the Apostle Paul observed and examined the idols in Athens before reasoning in the marketplace and speaking to the philosophers in the Areopagus, I evaluated the environment and mindset at Venice Beach before interacting with the people and passing out some of my books and pamphlets.

One area of the beach had fitness equipment and gymnastic apparatus so I began there. In an attempt to get myself acclimated before interacting with the people—and maybe to fulfill a teenage dream—I climbed to the top of a high rope, did a few tricks on the gymnastic rings and parallel bars, and punched the speed bag. Now I was ready to interact with the people.

Lined along the beach was a seemingly endless array of booths displaying every imaginable philosophy from hate Christ, the Bible stinks and Jesus is a fake, to give your kids pot and pot for babies, to, animal rights and gay activists, to psychics, fortunetellers, and Tarot card readers.

At one of the booths an elderly Caucasian woman and her much younger African American husband were dressed in bathrobes. After engaging them in conversation for several minutes to discover the philosophy they were propagating, I gave the woman a copy of my book, Who Is This Jesus? She was warmly excited and asked if she could really keep it—as virtually everything there is for sale. When I said, “Sure,” she promised she would read it.

After talking to people at several more booths, I felt drawn to a booth displaying a large sign advertising a master Tarot card reader. I love to engage top occultists and New Agers in conversation concerning Jesus Christ and the Bible. So, in hope of gaining an opportunity to share with this master of divination and fortunetelling, I asked him how he came to his journey of spiritual revelation.

Fascinated by my question he asked me to sit with him at his booth as he shared the story of his spiritual journey, and I interjected questions and comments. We talked for almost an hour as he chased away potential customers by saying, “Can’t you see that I am in a

fascinating conversation?"

He was an accountant and was almost finished writing a book revealing the secret that he said will bring peace to our nation and world within fifty years. He stated that God speaks to him directly and the Bible is inaccurate and Jesus could not be the only way because we are all divine. According to him, everyone needed to have a marriage of their inner female and inner male self to attain enlightenment and become one.

Finally he asked me to tell him my spiritual journey. This was the opportunity for which I had waited. Had I not listened to him, he would have never listened to me.

The sharing of my testimony and our interaction resulted in an incredible opportunity to present Jesus' unique claims, prophecies concerning His Second Coming, and one's eternal destiny. I was able to share the whole plan of salvation with a man who would have otherwise rejected it outright. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit deals with this man in such a way that he comes to know the true Prince of Peace and has real answers to life and eternity.

The philosophies being expounded at many of the booths might seem bizarre to some but they are being accepted by multitudes of youth and adults across our nation and world. All this would be laughable if the reality was not so diabolically dangerous and deadly. Millions of people—even many who were raised in church—have been influenced by similar philosophies. Many more of our young people are being stripped of their biblical faith while attending colleges and universities. Numerous formerly professing Christians have renounced faith in the biblical Jesus for foolish and vain philosophies.

Do you realize that when I research or have encounters with those adhering to New Age and occult beliefs, my mind is in an analytical mode? I am critiquing, evaluating, and sifting everything through God's Word. I have spent time in prayer and fasting to have discernment from His Spirit. But when youth and adults sit there being entertained or participating in activities with an attitude of receptivity, they are violating God's clear scriptural warning concerning what should fill our minds. A gradual desensitization,

indoctrination, and transition often occurs—eventually altering one's worldview.

If you think New Age philosophies and practices are innocent, then consider an ad in a New Age magazine selling T-shirts with the following on it:

Your God requires blood sacrifice, subjugation of women, annihilation of cities, slaughter of multitudes, unquestioned obedience, murder of His own son, destruction by flood, and as a grand finale, He plans to destroy the world by fire! And you ask me why I'm a Pagan?

Out of context these accusations seem to make sense and could cause one to question God and reject the Bible, but when you evaluate these comments in the context of Scripture and history, they can easily be refuted. However, young people who do not know God's Word or do not have a strong relationship with the Lord can be easily swayed with such hostile philosophies that seek to undermine biblical faith and values. Pastors and Christian leaders who ignorantly or supposedly innocently open their churches to any kind of New Age or occult beliefs and practices are unleashing great spiritual harm.

Believers who want to stand firm in these days of increasing deception need discernment—which comes by studying Scripture and knowing the voice of His Spirit as a result of spending time with the Lord in prayer and fasting. Courage and love are also needed if one is to gain opportunities to share Christ with those who may be hostile to the Gospel or have distorted perspectives of Biblical Christianity.

Although we may disagree with them or even hate the philosophy or lifestyle they represent, we must display respect. We must look at anyone involved in New Age or occult beliefs as someone for whom Jesus Christ died. Also, we must not be intimidated or fearful, but go on their turf and to their meetings to share the genuine love, truth, and power of Jesus Christ.

Called to Be a Shaman

A teenager who had once been a seemingly committed believer was taken by his parents to a “signs and wonders” church frequently visited by the “prophets” and where unbiblical phenomena disguised as the Holy Spirit frequently occurred. He and his parents eventually had enough of the bizarre behavior and left for a safer church. But like many young people and adults exposed to a distorted and often perverted form of Christianity, he rejected genuine Biblical Christianity along with the imitation and counterfeit he experienced at the previous church.

About a year later I met him while walking in the park. I asked him how he was doing with the Lord. He related that God had been speaking to him every day. He said, “He has called me to be a shaman. I am just waiting for him to send me a teacher.” His eyes widened in surprise as I related how I had led a shaman to Christ. “This shaman,” I said, “left his darkness and came to the light. So why is the Lord leading you to leave the light and go back to the darkness?” He replied, “I don’t believe shamanism is ‘darkness.’ I believe we can learn truth about God and Jesus through all religions.” Before we parted I encouraged him to read the Gospel of John and the book of 1 John.

Our Young People Are Being Seduced

I have warned how our young people are being seduced by the occultism they are exposed to through the media, school, and even in some churches. There is a price to pay by parents who allow their children to watch movies and television shows, listen to music, play video games, and participate in activities with occult overtones, or attend churches and conferences where unscriptural teaching and phenomena are occurring.

It may initially seem harmless, but in the end it could prove fatal. The world is filled with Christians who have been sabotaged and shipwrecked in their faith because of false teachings and unbiblical techniques. One day these parents will be heartbroken as they face the tragic consequences of defiant children who reject the Jesus of the Bible and clear biblical teachings.

Yoga and Martial Arts in the Church

While some pastors are refusing to compromise and conform to the status quo, others are welcoming yoga and seemingly innocent martial art classes into their churches, allowing an unholy mix of New Age philosophies and practices. Who will the Lord command—the pastor who tries to grow a church by blending Christianity with New Age, occult, and Eastern mysticism, or the pastor who protects his flock from seductive and dangerous teachings and practices?

I believe the words Jesus spoke to the church in Pergamum (a church that did not deny His name but allowed an unholy mix of false teachings and unbiblical practices) are His words of rebuke to many pastors and churches today:

But I have a few things against you, because you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality (Revelation 2:14).

Hundreds of young people and adults have shared with me the eventual spiritual oppression and confusion they experienced through martial arts and yoga practices. Many who wanted to serve the Lord wholeheartedly went through years of anguish in unraveling the techniques and philosophies they were taught that enveloped their minds and hearts.

Idolatry and Immorality at a Health Center

Several years ago my wife and I attended a health clinic in Southern California for one week. It focused on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, mostly from a New Age perspective, so our involvement was limited to exercise, wheat grass juice, and organic salads.

People there were involved in everything from various styles of the martial arts, yoga, meditation, chanting, toning, visualization, and recognizing the god within, to “the Golden serpent moving with energy up their spines and to their heads.”

All this seemed like love and spirituality on the surface—but underneath was rejection of the Creator, pride and egotism, and in many cases, subtle or blatant idolatry and immorality.

Interestingly, what was visibly manifest were the very two things that repeatedly took down Israel—idolatry/false gods and sexual immorality. No wonder the admonition of Acts 15:29 to the early church included abstaining from food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. God knows our human weaknesses and where the enemy focuses his deceptive attacks.

Initially, we thought the Lord led us there to be a witness for Him as we had during our previous visits. But at the end of our stay this time we realized the Lord sent us there for another reason—to expose this new spirituality sweeping our country and world. We both also determined in our hearts that no matter what the health benefits were, we would not return.

The people—many who had a Christian background—rejected Jesus without ever knowing Him. Others had been steeped in mysticism and occultism their whole lives.

A seventy-six-year-old business man told me he rejected Christianity (Catholicism) in his thirties because he felt closer to God on LSD than doing “Hail Mary’s.” He spent the rest of his life in every New Age and Eastern mystical experience imaginable. When I asked him his concept of eternal life, he said he believed God is spirit and will be a he or a she, or personal or impersonal—he wasn’t sure. He believes when he dies it will be darkness, but his spirit will live on and he will be able to escape the darkness through meditation. He encouraged me to reject Christianity and embrace his belief system—a chaotic mess of confusion and hopelessness.

There was absolutely nothing impressive in this man or anyone else there that I desired in the least. It only showed me how the Gospel of Jesus Christ is amazing and superior to any other beliefs. Karen’s and my daily Bible studies that week were in the books of Philippians and Colossians, which reveal Christ’s surpassing greatness.

Our spirits were grieved. Many times I fell on my knees and prayed with Karen in our room, “O Lord, how can we reach these people?” They would accept and tolerate anything and everything—except Biblical Christianity.

During the testimony time and talent show, some of them praised the gods who provided wheat grass and others praised the gods within. They used vulgar language, engaged in opposite and same sex kissing on the lips, and flaunted licentious behavior.

Many people I knew from my youth rejected Christ because they wanted to continue in their immoral lifestyles. However, these people embraced a spirituality that allowed them to feel connected to God while continuing any lifestyle and pursuit they desired. But their source of spirituality was obvious from their conversations and behavior.

As we prayed for these people, and wondered why we could not reach even one as we had during two previous stays at this clinic, the Lord spoke to my heart that they had become like many of the people mentioned in Revelation—they refused to repent. It was as though they were under a strong seductive influence, like the people at the golden calf (Exodus 32), or the Israelites at Shittim, when the men sinned with the Moabite women and offered sacrifices to their gods (Numbers 25).

These people had seared consciences and reprobate minds. It was obvious from what they were willing to accept (virtually anything), and what they openly rejected (the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ). Because they did not love the truth, a strong delusion had overtaken them.

Many people are rapidly moving in this direction of false spirituality and immorality. Time is short and this nation and world are rapidly changing. We must reach as many people as possible with the true Gospel while we still have opportunity.

It is imperative we stand strong in our faith in Christ and keep our lives and churches pure and untainted by an unholy mix. We must provide our children and young people clear and accurate biblical instruction so they can discern what is false and defend their faith.

Another Jesus Is Being Offered to the World

There is an accurate saying that Satan will use nine truths to get one lie across. The primary lie he attempts to propagate concerns

the identity of Jesus Christ—the One before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. Satan’s ultimate deception is to hinder your acceptance of Christ or to sway you to follow “another Jesus” other than the Jesus of the Bible (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

While some demote Jesus to merely a great teacher or prophet, others say we all have the potential to become another Christ, still others will simply substitute Jesus with someone or something else. Attempts are made to minimize, distort, deny, or replace Him—all have eternal implications (John 8:24). Anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, God incarnate in human flesh, and the only way of salvation can be scripturally identified as a false prophet or teacher (1 John 2:22-23; 4:1-3; 5:1). As Jesus ascended to heaven, two angels said to the disciples:

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

Please notice, it will not be another Jesus or a reincarnation of the Christ spirit, but the same Jesus who ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives will be returning in all His glory.

The time is soon coming when “the kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Revelation 11:15). Jesus will establish His righteous Kingdom wherein true believers will rule and reign with Him for eternity and inherit all God has prepared for those who love and obey Him. Do not settle for an imitation or counterfeit when you can know the True One who leads to eternal life.

Is Positive Confession the Secret to Receiving God's Blessing?

I believe in having a positive attitude. I see too many negative, pessimistic, complaining, whining, and defeated Christians who are controlled by worry, fear, jealousy, bitterness, revenge, and hopelessness. The internal stress of these negative and destructive emotions can make you sick and turn people off to the Gospel. Love, joy, peace, and hope are attitudes conducive to good health and to being a good witness.

During the early years of my ministry, I was asked to visit a young man who had been admitted to the hospital with stomach pains. When I arrived he was in the intensive care unit with pancreatitis. His condition went from bad to worse and it appeared there was little hope for him to survive.

Before he was transferred to a hospital in Pittsburgh, I was able to see him several times. Although he was unable to respond, and although the nurses said he was unable to hear me, I knew his mind could comprehend what I was saying. So I shared words of encouragement and quoted Scriptures such as Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," in an attempt to give him hope and courage. I let him know that we would stand with him and continue to pray until he came through this crisis. I also used Scripture to convince him how important his mental attitude was at this time, and that he must not give up!

In Pittsburgh, he had a dramatic recovery. When he finally came home, he said, "The only thing I remember about the first hospital was a young man who repeatedly entered my room. He would quote Scripture and reassure me that I could make it!"

When he finally found out who I was, he informed me that my encouraging him and giving him hope was one of the main things that helped him recover. His wife thanked me for saving her husband's life.

Positive, Not Presumptuous

I am probably one of the most positive, optimistic people you will ever meet. I have attempted to build my life and ministry on such biblical principles as determination, faith, courage, obedience, discipline, commitment, love, joy, and peace. These are very positive. I believe in having positive and unwavering faith as I take on challenges, face “giants,” attempt to do exploits for the Lord, and believe God to do the impossible through my life and ministry.

While I do believe in these biblical principles, I do not believe in telling God what I want with a “give me” mentality. I do not believe in usurping God’s Lordship and sovereignty by trying to force, coerce, or manipulate Him to respond by using the right formula or technique.

While the positive confession concept as a new Christian encouraged me to walk in faith and confidence and victory, I also began to notice a growing distortion of its truth. It got out of biblical balance. When we begin confessing our will and desires into existence or when we teach that whatever we want, we just confess it and believe it and we have it—that is more like the occultism I abandoned and less and less like the Scripture I was studying.

I believe there is a subtle, but distinct, line between standing in faith while confessing His will, and being in rebellion by attempting to control God through self-centered, self-motivated confession. We are not dealing with an impersonal energy force—but the awesome, personal, infinite God of the Bible who is sovereign Lord over the universe.

Attempting to create or alter reality contrary to His will through the “power of faith” and “positive confession” is really a form of “Christianized sorcery.”

“Divine Health” in a Fallen World?

There are people who claim they walk in “divine health.” This is easy to do when one is young and healthy but more difficult as one grows older. Just give me five minutes with anyone who believes or teaches this and I can easily show how utterly absurd and foolish it is by pointing out “symptoms of decay” in their own bodies. All of us manifest evidence of less-than-ideal health.

I am in better physical shape and live a healthier life than most Christians I have met, yet I cannot be deluded to think I have achieved “divine health.” I realize I am in a fallen world with a slowly deteriorating body. Although I have excellent health, the constant “giving of my body” for the sake of the Gospel takes its toll. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” I am waiting for this body to be transformed into a perfect resurrected body at the Lord’s return (Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:35-57; Philippians 3:20-21).

Until my Lord returns I will take care of my body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, that I might better serve Him. Living by the biblical principles of health and nutrition have proved far superior to any other lifestyle available.

“Selfianity”

In many circles Christianity has been replaced by what I call “Selfianity.” “Selfianity” is people serving God for what they can get from Him. As long as He is blessing them they honor Him; when the prosperity terminates, so does their commitment. People who adhere to “Selfianity” want to be their own gods, declare their own futures, decree their own destinies, and fulfill their own dreams and desires.

“Selfianity” is a subtle twisting of Scripture—actually a total reversal of what God’s Word teaches in context. Behind the facade of biblical terminology and supposed exaltation of Christ, lurks a philosophy of self-centeredness, rebellion against the God of the Bible, and sorcery.

A sorcerer seeks to use the proper spells, incantations, formulas, and rituals to control people and circumstances, to obtain their intended purpose. Many professing believers in Jesus seek to manipulate God in similar fashion through “proper” confession.

A woman who was having problems with her car was praying for someone to come and give her a ride. When I walked in, she was very discouraged; so, as I gave her a ride, I began to share some of the highlights concerning how God provided our “miracle van”

when it was totally impossible.

She became very encouraged and excited and said, “Are you into prosperity?” I responded, “I am into the Lord! All that matters to me is Jesus Christ. I do not serve Him for what He gives me. I serve Him because of who He is.” I have learned like Paul:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

Then she asked, “Well, did you confess this van into being?” I responded, “No, I got on my knees, prayed, fasted, and asked, ‘Father, what is Your will? You know the future. You know which vehicle we need for our ministry. You know all things. Please show us Your will, and fulfill and perform Your will in this situation.’ So He showed us His will, and it was to get this van. Then for months as the van sat unsold in the car dealer’s lot, we trusted God to provide the funds. He faithfully intervened in some incredible ways to provide this ‘miracle van.’ ” #160;”

Are you confessing and asserting your will or praying for God’s will and submitting to the leading of His Spirit? Are you attempting to force God to give you what you want now or trusting Him to fulfill His purpose and do what is ultimately best?

Don’t be deceived into wasting your life on “Selfianity” and seeking to be your own god. Why settle for vain philosophies and imitation techniques which are far inferior to what the Holy Spirit and obedience to God’s Word can accomplish in your life?

Satan Exalted Himself...Christ Humbly Obeyed

Who made some of the most positive confessions in the Bible? Satan. He spoke such positive statements as: “You surely will not die! You will be like God” (Genesis 3:4-5).

Another positive confession is found in Isaiah 14. It says concerning

the “king of Babylon”:

But you said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:13-14).

God said:

Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit (Isaiah 14:15).

The problem with this type of positive confession is that it is positively wrong. In contrast, Philippians 2:5-8 states, regarding Christ:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

As a result of this, the outcome for Jesus is the exact opposite of what happened to Satan. Philippians 2:9-11 states:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Stand in God’s Will

When I gave my life to Jesus Christ, I dethroned self. I am not going to return to that former lifestyle. I do not want to play God, exert my godhood, decree my will, or replace His Lordship with my own.

Many Christians fall away after they go through difficult times or when God doesn’t give them what they want. They often fall because they have been taught an unscriptural Christianity and

have not made Christ Lord of their lives.

My responsibility is to do what Jesus did—humble myself, be obedient to the Father's will, and exalt and glorify Him. I frequently get on my knees in prayer and fasting to seek His will and know His Word and Spirit. Then I stand in His strength, proclaim His will, and walk in obedience until He fulfills it.

When we operate from this scriptural foundation, we are assured of God's provision, empowering, and the fulfillment of His promises.

When our ministry was still very young, my wife and I and our two children lived in an apartment. As the ministry continued to grow, we looked for a house to move into so we could have our offices in the basement. Instead of opening just one door so we could conveniently walk through it, God opened two doors simultaneously so we would have to make a decision.

The one house was very large and ideal for my objectives. The other house was much smaller and not as adequate. Most everyone said, "Bill, you are a child of the King. You tell God what you want and He will give it to you." I replied, "There is something wrong with that. I am not God. I cannot foresee the future. In my limited foresight I cannot determine which will ultimately be the best decision. I do not know the end result; I do not know what God's total plan is. I walk by faith, not by sight."

Then I said, "What I am going to do is this: instead of me telling God what to do, I am going to get on my knees. I am going to pray and fast and find out what His will is, and then I will be obedient to how He leads. I will stand and confess His will, not mine."

God spoke to my heart to move into the smaller house. In obedience, I did. For months I wondered why. I said, "You know I trust You Lord, but that other house was so much nicer and much more adequate." He spoke to my heart, "Trust Me!"

A few months later, we had 3.7 acres of prime land donated to us. The land was located behind the house we were renting and was appraised at \$80,000 back in 1981. Shortly thereafter, the Lord strongly led us to step out in faith and build a ministry center on

this property. The Lord intervened in a mighty way, enabling us to overcome many “giants” and complete a half-million-dollar project without a penny of interest being paid. If I had moved into the larger, more adequate house, I would have missed the tremendous blessing and victory God gave to us for obeying His will and not seeking our own.

Do not tell God what you want Him to do. Do not try to force God to do your will. Get into His Word and get on your knees and pray and fast and seek His will. Then stand in faith until He fulfills what He has led you to do.

My prayer for guidance is often something like: “Lord, give me sensitivity and discernment as You speak to my heart by Your Word and Spirit, unwavering faith to believe You, and obedience to do what You lead me to do.” Then I trust Him “who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

There have been countless miracles in my life and ministry. However, before the Lord intervened in what He led me to step out in faith and do, I repeatedly heard people say: “That is impossible! You can’t do it!” And they were right—by myself I couldn’t. But an all-powerful God intervened and made the seemingly impossible possible. He did so because I was seeking His will, not my own. I was walking in obedience to His Word and the leading of His Spirit. I was seeking to glorify Him, not myself.

First Seek the Lord—His Blessing Will Follow

Instead of determining what I want God’s will to be, then hoping He blesses my decision, I seek the Lord with all my heart through prayer, fasting, and reading Scripture. Until He gives clear direction, I walk by faith using wisdom as I live by biblical principles.

I have discovered a pattern in Scripture and have witnessed it in my life and ministry repeatedly. Once the Lord leads me to do something and I step out in faith and obedience, more often than not, just about everything imaginable goes wrong. It seems impossible to be fulfilled and defeat seems apparent. Then the Lord intervenes in His time and in His way and is faithful to bring

ultimate victory. This way He alone gets the glory!

The “Secret” to God’s Blessing

The many blessings and miracles God has bestowed in my life, family and ministry have not come about because of “proper confession” or using the “right” technique, formula or ritual, but because of faith in Him and obedience to His Word. I have not sought these things, but I have sought Him: to know and obey His will and to make Him Lord over every aspect of my life. As a result, He has honored and blessed me in many ways. My motivation is not merely to receive His blessing; I don’t serve Him for prosperity. For, if He removes His hand of blessing (as He has occasionally done), I will still serve and honor Him.

The Lord has blessed me financially, but we choose to give most of it away and live a moderate lifestyle. I could be easily justified in accepting a salary of two or even three times more than I do, but we have chosen instead to use that money to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Some people spend their time and energy trying to get God to give them wealth and prosperity. However, Scripture indicates that spiritual riches are far more important than material wealth; honoring Him proves to be the wisest path.

Jesus said: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). The Apostle Paul admonishes: “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2). First Timothy 6:18 instructs: “Be rich in good works, be generous and ready to share” which will lay up treasure for you in the coming age.

No Good Thing Does He Withhold

On a hot August day, following a hard workout on the obstacle course at the ministry center, my then 14-year-old grandson and I were talking about the Lord and Scripture while recuperating in hammocks. He mentioned he had recently read Psalm 84 so I focused on verses 11 and 12:

...No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!

“Look around,” I said, “and see how God has fulfilled His Word: We started with literally nothing and God has blessed us with a wonderful family and eleven awesome grandchildren. He has provided a beautiful property surrounded with trees like an oasis, a ministry center, a house, a vehicle and everything else that is good for us. We may not have a boat, a plane or much money, and have faced many challenges, but we don’t need a boat, a plane or lots of money, and the challenges have made us strong. God has given us everything we need and blessed us beyond measure. He has been faithful and proven His Word to be true.”

The heroes of the faith willingly gave up the pleasures and treasures of this world to focus on future blessings and eternal riches. So too, I have earnestly sought to put the Lord first in everything, and He has honored and blessed me. I have discovered the reality of the following biblical promises:

Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).

No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11).

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

The Lord has taught me that I cannot manipulate Him to give me what I want. However, if I delight myself in Him, seek His will, and walk in obedience to it, He will grant the desires of my heart (because they will be His desires as well) and abundantly bless beyond what I could ever ask or think—beyond my greatest expectations.

Keep Scripture in Context

You cannot take scriptural passages out of context and expect to build sound theology. Study Scripture in context to correctly handle the word of truth to obtain a clearer and more “balanced”

understanding. This will safeguard you from the extreme perspectives and distortions many come to from taking verses out of context or approaching the Bible with preconceived ideas.

Also realize, Scripture interprets Scripture. Part of a truth might be found in the book of John and an additional insight in James or Hebrews. Scripture must be treated as a whole.

John 14:14 states, “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” Many Christians quote this verse out of context and make the erroneous conclusion that whatever they ask of God, He is obligated to do. They ignore the next verse which gives the biblical balance, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). If you truly love Him and are obeying His Word then whatever you ask for would be consistent with His will.

Be careful not to focus only on God’s promises and blessings and forget His inherent requirements and responsibilities. People who use verses out of context or resort to gimmicks and techniques such as reciting special prayers and confessions of faith in an attempt to achieve their own desires and goals are wasting their time. Like the grass and flowers of the field, they and their selfish desires will soon fade away.

I believe the main scriptural criteria for receiving and maintaining God’s blessings in both this life and eternity are obedience and faithfulness to Him. Deuteronomy 30:8 reads, “And you shall again obey the Lord, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.” As a result, Deuteronomy 30:9 promises:

Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good....

Deuteronomy chapters 28 to 30 reveal that obedience results in receiving God’s blessing, while those who are disobedient will be cursed by God (no matter what they confess).

Don’t be fooled. Material wealth is not necessarily the evidence of God’s blessing. Some of the most righteous people throughout the

pages of Scripture and history suffered great persecution and lived in less than ideal conditions. Their wealth was not in physical objects, but in their rich relationship with the Lord.

Leviticus chapter 26 is also about being blessed because of obedience and being cursed because of disobedience. In fact, the only “confession” we see in this chapter dealing with God’s blessings and curses is in verse 40, and it is in regard to “confessing their iniquity.”

Principles on Prayer

As I sought the Lord concerning a prayer request, He impressed on my heart several scriptural truths and principles that should all be working simultaneously. The following are a few highlights:

1) Right Motives:

James 4:3: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

2) According to His Will:

1 John 5:14: “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

3) Persistence:

Luke 11:5-10: “Then He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight, and says to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; and from inside he answers and says, “Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.’” #160;”

4) Do Not Doubt:

James 1:6-7: “But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.”

Hebrews 11:1, 6: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

5) Mountain-Moving Faith:

Mark 9:23: “And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.’ ”

Mark 11:23: “Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”

6) Do Not Be Anxious—Be Thankful:

Philippians 4:6-7: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Colossians 4:2: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

7) Obedience:

John 14:14-15: “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

John 15:7: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

1 John 3:21-24: “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that

are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

8) Clean Heart Before God:

2 Chronicles 6:36-39: “When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to a land far off or near, if they take thought in the land where they are taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, ‘We have sinned, we have committed iniquity and have acted wickedly’; if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been taken captive, and pray toward their land which You have given to their fathers and the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name, then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayer and supplications, and maintain their cause and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.”

2 Chronicles 7:13-14: “If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Psalm 66:18: “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”

Isaiah 1:15-17: “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

James 5:16-18: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and

pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

9) Delight Yourself in the Lord:

Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Matthew 6:33: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Is Much of Today's "Prophesying," in Reality, "Christianized Fortunetelling"?

There are two "extreme" positions concerning prophecy: 1) To despise prophetic utterance and thereby quench the Spirit; and 2) To encourage or tolerate a form of prophecy that is unscriptural.

I believe that prophecy is for today. I believe the New Testament indicates that the gift of prophecy should be in operation in the Church (1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 14; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 1 Timothy 4:14). In 1 Corinthians 14:39, Paul encourages believers to "desire earnestly to prophesy...." However, I do not believe in endorsing the tremendous misuse and abuse of this gift today. I will not tolerate those who speak from their own inspiration nor the demonic counterfeits which are being enthusiastically received in many Christian circles.

The Expository Dictionary of Bible Words states:

The basic word for 'prophet' in the OT is *nabi*, which means 'spokesman' or 'speaker.' Essentially a prophet is a person authorized to speak for another, as Moses (Exodus 7:1-2; Numbers 12:1-8) and the OT prophets were authorized to speak for God.... The Greek word *prophetes* (prophet) is the only word the NT uses to translate the Hebrew *nabi*. Related NT words are *propheteuo* ('to prophesy'), *prophetis* ('prophetess'), and *propheteia* ('prophetic saying, gift, or activity').⁸

Two Types of False Prophets

There are two main types of false prophets in the Bible. First, there are those who speak and prophesy in the name of other gods such as Baal (Jeremiah 2:8; 23:13; 32:32-35). This type of false prophet is very easy to distinguish, but it gets more difficult and confusing when we deal with the second type of false prophets.

There are false prophets who claim to prophesy in the name of the Lord; yet, they are proclaiming the word that the Lord has not told

them to proclaim. A few examples follow:

Jeremiah 14:14:

Then the Lord said to me, “The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.”

Jeremiah 23:16, 21-22, 30-32:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord. I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds. Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the Lord, “who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the Lord, “who use their tongues and declare, ‘The Lord declares.’ Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the Lord, “and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,” declares the Lord.

Ezekiel 13:2-3, 6, 8:

Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, “Listen to the word of the Lord!” Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, ‘The Lord declares,’ when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord God.”

Matthew 7:22-23:

Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

1 John 4:1:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Not All Who Say, “Thus Says the Lord,” Are Speaking the Word of the Lord

When I was a new Christian, I learned this lesson very well—that not everyone who says, “Thus says the Lord,” is really speaking the word of the Lord.

Prior to a three-week mission to Mexico, God had impressed on my heart and my wife Karen’s heart to go to Bible college. Upon our return from the mission trip, preparations were underway for our move to Mt. Vernon, Ohio, the location of the Bible college. A woman, who was a so-called prophetess and did not know what the Lord had already clearly spoken to Karen and me, prophesied over us during a service, saying we were to go back to Mexico.

I said to her, “I’m still a relatively new Christian and do not know the Word very well yet, but I do know that if God told me to go to Bible college, if God told me to buy a mobile home, if God enabled us to find the very last mobile home lot on which we could put our mobile home in that city, then God wants me there. And that’s where I am going!”

I had to decide: Do I follow the voice of someone telling me God’s will for my life, or do I follow God’s Word and what His Spirit has led me to do? I chose to follow the Lord and what I knew to be His clear direction. Many times since, I have reflected back on how disastrous my life and ministry would have been had I not followed His direction during that crucial decision in my life. Because I obeyed God’s voice, He has produced tremendous fruit through our

ministry, done the impossible through our lives, and honored and blessed us greatly. This woman, who people exalted and almost deified, eventually fell away from the Lord.

In a tragic story in 1 Kings 13, we see that the word of the Lord came to a man of God and told him what he was to do. In obedience he began to follow the word of the Lord, but when a false prophet told him something contrary to what God had already told him to do, he obeyed that prophet. As a result of obeying the deceiving prophet, and thereby disobeying the Lord, the man was killed by a lion that very day.

The message is clear: When God speaks to you, obey! If what God says contradicts what a prophet says, then follow the word of the Lord and do not follow that prophet.

God wants you to obey His voice and His Word. Develop that relationship with Him, and do not give responsibility to any supposed prophet or anyone who prophesies over you. It is between you and the Lord. (For background information and context read 1 Kings 11:43 through 12:33, as well as all of 1 Kings 13.)

False Leaders Use Control and Manipulation

It is both dangerous and diabolical that some use “Thus says the Lord” to control and manipulate people. One of many illustrations I could cite concerns a young man who called me because he was very confused about the teaching he was receiving in church from his pastor. He wanted to leave this church, but his pastor said: “Thus says the Lord, if you leave, one of your children will die.” Needless to say, he was terrorized and afraid to leave.

Think about some of the prophecies today in light of what Peter said:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words;

their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Tell Me God's Will for My Life

When I was a new Christian, people tried to tell me what the Lord wanted me to do. As I matured in the Lord, they wanted me to tell them God's will for their lives. I will not have any part of either one. I will share the Word and what the Holy Spirit impresses on my heart and pray for them, but the final responsibility concerning God's direction for one's life lies between God and that individual.

I remember when I was a brand-new Christian. I went to a man of God whom I greatly respected. I said, "You are so close to the Lord, He speaks to you so much. Would you pray and tell me what God wants me to do?" It was a cop-out. I wanted a quick, easy, convenient way to get God's guidance. He said, "Bill, it is your responsibility to seek God's will for your life. You had better learn right now to discipline yourself to get into God's Word and get on your knees to seek God's will and know His voice." Although I was at first disappointed, he taught me a very crucial biblical principle.

In John 10:27, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." We need to hear and know Jesus' voice.

If we are not on speaking terms with the Lord—so that He has to speak to someone else to tell us what to do—then we had better repent. We better discipline ourselves before the Lord and get into His Word and seek Him through prayer and fasting (as the true prophets in the Bible did) so we, too, can hear His voice.

The Supernatural and Spectacular Are Not the Usual

Many think those who are seemingly hearing frequent audible voices, having visions, personal prophecies, revelations, and words from the Lord are super-spiritual. Without getting into the exaggeration and sensationalism of this, I wonder where their hearts are before the Lord. Are they hardhearted and insensitive to His Spirit? Are they undisciplined to read His Word and to pray? Is the use of the spectacular the only way He can get them to hear His voice and obey?

I would rather be so sensitive and surrendered to the Lord that He can speak to my heart through His Word and Spirit—without always having to do something extraordinary to get my attention, or without having to send some prophet to get my life in order or to tell me what to do. Usually in the case of hardheartedness, such as Baalam when God spoke through a donkey, or for special situations like Moses at the burning bush when He called him to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, or when God gave Peter a vision to do something “unthinkable” (take the Gospel to the Gentiles), did God resort to supernatural, spectacular ways of revealing His will?

Prophets Are Not Our “Guides”

Donald Gee writes in his book, Concerning Spiritual Gifts:

There are no indications in the New Testament that it is the function of prophets in the church to be her guides in the sense that they guided Israel of old—by a system of “inquiring of the Lord.” There are indeed instances such as the prophecy of Agabus concerning the forthcoming famine (Acts 11:28), or the fate of Paul at Jerusalem (Acts 21:11), where the prophet plainly foretells what may happen. But it is significant that he offers no guidance; it is left to the individual members of the church to determine...what they would do (Acts 11:29), and to Paul to decide his own course of action (Acts 21:13).

Still more significant is the fact that there is no attempt to use the gift of prophecy or the office of prophet in the great dispute that arose about circumcision in Acts 15; or in Paul’s obvious personal dilemma as to the next step for his ministry in Acts 16:6-10, though on both occasions Silas, a recognized “prophet” (Acts 15:32), was on the spot.

It can truthfully be affirmed that there is not one single instance of the gift of prophecy being deliberately resorted to for guidance in the New Testament.⁹

Even though there are prophets and prophecy in the New Testament, these are not the same as they were in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the prophet was often like Moses

or Samuel who was the recognized spokesman not only for God to the people, but for the people to God. He was the mediator. In the New Testament, when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the temple—separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies—was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Through Christ, our Mediator, we now have direct access to the presence of God.

There is also another aspect in the New Testament to consider—Pentecost. Now all believers can be filled with God's Spirit and be personally led by the Spirit of God. We have the promise of Romans 8:14, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Bonds and Afflictions Await Paul

The account of the prophecy by Agabus, that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem, is often inaccurately used to validate guidance through personal prophecy. Looking at this account in scriptural context reveals a different conclusion.

First, we discover that before Agabus prophesied, Paul already knew from the Holy Spirit that bonds and afflictions awaited him. Acts 20:22-23 says:

And now, behold, bound by the spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

Acts 21:4 repeats this:

After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

Then in Acts 21:10-14, Agabus confirms:

As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

The prophet Agabus merely told Paul what was going to happen. It was Paul's responsibility to determine what he would do. We need to keep that scriptural balance in mind.

After Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the Lord once again confirmed that it was His leading for Paul to go to Jerusalem, for He said to the apostle in Acts 23:11:

Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.

Prophets and Personal Prophecy Book

The owner of a Christian bookstore asked me to review a leading book on the topic of prophets and personal prophecy. I gave it to our research director, and after only twenty minutes of checking, he said it was false. Next, I gave it to a biblical apologist who said it was unscriptural. Then I gave it to an Assemblies of God pastor who is very knowledgeable of Scripture, and he said the foundation principles of it were built on sand. Finally, I read it myself and confirmed the book was in error.

My basic conclusion after reading this book is that the author has deviated from the truth in three ways:

1. He has taken the scriptural promises and blessings that are for those who have faith and obedience in the Lord and His Word and reinterpreted them to be for those who have faith and obedience in prophets and personal prophecy. A very subtle transition occurs much in the same way Satan subtly changed God's Word as he tempted people in Scripture.
2. He has reinterpreted and taken out of scriptural context almost every Scripture that refers directly or indirectly to prophets and personal prophecy, trying to justify his

emphasis on multitudes of personal prophecies.

3. He is teaching “Christian fortunetelling” rather than the biblical operation of prophecy.

Scripture-twisting

Many people who profess to love the Lord are caught up in this twisting of Scripture. Christian leaders and those who claim to be prophets use this book (and similar books) as their source for prophetic guidelines. I wonder, “Where is their discernment? If they really have the Holy Spirit, why does He not speak to their hearts? If they know God’s Word, why do they not see how Scripture is being twisted?

Over and over as I read or listened to materials by those endorsing personal prophecy, the Scriptures were taken out of context, the meanings were twisted, and the Scripture references given were often totally unrelated to the unscriptural conclusions they made. It was the same Scripture-twisting tactics used by many cults to lure those with little Bible knowledge, and who lack the time or motivation to search Scripture, to blindly follow their beliefs and practices.

Control and Manipulation

Leaders of a discipleship movement supposedly repented of the “wrong and injurious” extremes and the “unhealthy submission resulting in perverse and unbiblical obedience to human leaders.”¹⁰ But something very similar and even more sinister is occurring through many supposed prophets and personal prophecies.

A woman from Florida, a charismatic believer who is constantly in the Word, went to a church affiliated with the prophets. She said as soon as she walked in, she knew in her spirit something was wrong. Not only did they give an incorrect prophecy concerning her, but also she said, “The people were controlled by the prophets and prophetesses in the church.”

It was the “spirit of shepherding and discipleship” manifest through the so-called prophets. It was the same control and manipulation, the same replacing of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s Lordship with

human beings whom we look to for decisions and guidance.

How accurate Jeremiah was for today when he said: “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so ...” (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

It is interesting that many of these so-called prophets only seem to prophesy flattery and great things for their associates. However, they often resort to a form of “black magic” by mainly prophesying doom and destruction against those who disagree or oppose them.

I wondered why a so-called prophet of God did not detect and rebuke the spirit of deceit and occultism in a church where he frequently spoke. Instead, he prophesied blessing and that everything was right on course before the Lord. It was soon revealed that he spoke from his own inspiration, and he always had such positive words of blessing and prosperity because this church was supporting him financially. It reminds me of Micah 3:11: “...And her prophets divine for money....”

Nehemiah 6:10-14 records:

And when I entered the house of Shemaiah...he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night.” But I said, “Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.” Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me.

Demonically Inspired Prophecies

Shortly after confronting the pastor who motivated the writing of my initial Beware booklet, a prophecy proclaiming his vindication

and victory, followed by a prophecy for my immediate destruction, were given at a pastors' conference he attended hosting two "prophets."

These demonically inspired prophecies sounded so close to the truth—but in reality were so far away. If only those pastors had genuine discernment and went by the Word, they would not have been deceived. But they trusted in false prophets and false prophecies, which proved to be steppingstones to even greater deception.

It was because of the "apostles" and pastors' acceptance, tolerance, and endorsement of these prophecies that enabled this pastor to continue spiritually raping many more people until he was undeniably exposed in a scandal that devastated his church and family.

The prophecy of my doom indicated it would be just like Korah received for opposing Moses. But this erroneous prophecy was fatally flawed.

First, Moses challenged Korah and his accomplices to meet with him the next day to let the Lord decide (Numbers 16), but this pastor and his cohorts were afraid and unwilling to meet with me.

Second, in Scripture, God sent prophets to deliver warnings prior to His judgment, but these "prophets," "pastors," and "apostles" did not have the courage to even warn me about the prophecy of my impending destruction. They would not even give me a copy of the recorded prophecy. It was not until five years later that I finally was given a copy—only because a woman who could no longer tolerate the unbiblical nonsense left the church and gave it to me.

Third, Korah's judgment was meted out swiftly as the earth opened up and swallowed him, Dathan, Abiram, and their households (Numbers 16). The prophecy of my imminent destruction proved to be completely wrong as the Lord protected me in numerous extremely dangerous situations during overseas mission outreaches, and empowered and anointed me as the ministry continued to grow internationally. It was the pastor who received prophecies for blessing and victory that was "destroyed." Several of the ones who so vehemently opposed me experienced physical and spiritual

devastation.

As the years passed, the error of their ways and the resulting disastrous consequences became visible. The credibility and integrity of my life and ministry was enhanced as the test of time proved the truth of God's Word and the faithfulness of the God whom I serve.

Reflecting back on how his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt and the Lord turned it around for good, Joseph said to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

We read in Exodus 10:28-29:

Then Pharaoh said to him [Moses], "Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" Moses said, "You are right; I shall never see your face again!"

However, it did not happen the way Pharaoh expected. Neither did the prophecy for my destruction turn out as that pastor and his associates had hoped. Nor did it happen the way Haman anticipated. Esther 9:24-25 explains:

For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows" [which Haman himself had prepared for the Jews].

1 Kings 22:20-23 says:

And the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, "I will entice him." The Lord said to him, "How?" And he said, "I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then He said, "You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so." Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the

mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you.

In the same way as the preceding Scripture, the Lord showed me that He allowed that false prophecy so that those pastors would have a false assurance and security and boldly align themselves with this other pastor, thus exposing their true beliefs and eventually causing their own words to bring judgment on themselves.

Who Would You Believe?

The opposition and prophecy about my destruction came from people who were supposed “prophets,” “apostles,” and “pastors” who: had foundational beliefs about prophecy which are built on error and Scripture-twisting; made unscriptural excuses for not being 100 percent accurate; and propagated unbiblical teachings, practices, and phenomena.

The leading “apostle” announced from his pulpit prior to the prophecy for my destruction that the Lord had “led him to build his new church like Bill Rudge built his ministry center, on total faith without any interest or loans,” but months later when his “word from the Lord” was proven inaccurate he asked for anyone who had a word of direction from the Lord to let him know.

Should I have believed them? Or should I believe the Word of God and the Spirit of God? In over forty-five years of ministry, the Lord has fulfilled 100 percent of what I have publicly proclaimed that He has led me to do, much of which seemed totally impossible. God has been faithful—and the result has always been ultimate victory!

I think the spirit from which these supposed prophets prophesied is evident. It is the same spirit I have encountered over the years in dealing with many occultists. It is the same spirit that motivated someone from one of their churches to actually team up with a leading occultist and attempt to destroy my ministry. It is the same spirit that during this time spoke as a demon in a woman’s dream telling her to destroy my ministry and telling her husband (in her dream) to kill me.

I may one day die for Christ, but the Lord has assured me that my life will not be taken until His purpose is fulfilled. My prayer is: "Lord, let me have the grace, the power, the boldness, and the forgiving attitude of Your servant Stephen." (See Acts 6:8 - 7:60.)

The Final Test

The final test that proves who really heard from God is the end result. In Scripture, there are several instances where a false prophet opposed and attempted to undermine and discredit a true prophet of God. But in the end, God always vindicated and honored His true messenger.

Jeremiah 28:10-17 states:

Then Hananiah the [false] prophet took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the [true] prophet and broke it. Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'Even so will I break within two full years, the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.'" "#160;" Then the prophet Jeremiah went his way. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Go and speak to Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made instead of them yokes of iron." For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him. And I have also given him the beasts of the field.'" "#160;" Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die, because you have counseled rebellion against the Lord.'" "#160;" So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year in the seventh month.

On another occasion, Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks at the order of the priest Pashur, chief officer in the temple (Jeremiah 20:1-2), because Jeremiah had pronounced God's upcoming judgment on Jerusalem (Jeremiah 19:15). When Jeremiah was

released, the Lord again proclaimed through him judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (Jeremiah 20:3-5). Then Jeremiah prophesied to Pashur:

And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have falsely prophesied (Jeremiah 20:6).

After Jeremiah's release from a dungeon in which he would have surely died, and later his rescue from a cistern in which he would have starved to death, he prophesied to King Zedekiah:

If you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given over to the hand of the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand (Jeremiah 38:18).

We see the tragic fulfillment of this prophecy in Jeremiah, chapter 39.

False Peace Versus Impending Judgment

Even though Jeremiah's prophecies of the people being taken into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon were being fulfilled, Ahab and Zedekiah, two false prophets, continued to prophesy lies. As a result, they were burned in Nebuchadnezzar's fire—not spared like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Jeremiah 29:20-23 gives the following account of these two false prophets:

You, therefore, hear the word of the Lord, all you exiles, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying to you falsely in My name, "Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes. Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, 'May the Lord make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire, because they have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have spoken

words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows and am a witness,” declares the Lord.’

Occasionally the Lord has led me to caution or warn individuals or groups concerning unscriptural teachings and practices they are propagating. After a time of much prayer, fasting, Scripture study, and examining my heart and motives, I would do so. As I look back over the years, I am amazed and humbled that all those who refused to repent have become even more perverse in their teachings and practices and have eventually suffered the consequences.

I have seen the false teachings and the false prophets come and go. I can somewhat relate to Jeremiah, who after faithfully proclaiming God’s Word for many years, questioned King Zedekiah regarding the false prophets:

Where then are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, “The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land?” (Jeremiah 37:19).

Similar to the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day who were prophesying peace and prosperity, today’s “prophets” often proclaim renewal, revival, and restoration. But is much of the “revival” occurring today really a commitment to the Jesus Christ of Scripture, or is it merely an attraction to all the excitement and phenomena going on?

Jeremiah accurately prophesied God’s impending judgment because of the many sins of the people and their leaders. Lamentations 4:11-13 gives a glimpse of the consequences of sin and apostasy:

The Lord has accomplished His wrath, He has poured out His fierce anger; and He has kindled a fire in Zion which has consumed its foundations. The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the inhabitants of the world, that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem. Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed in her midst the blood of the righteous....

When the judgment foretold by Jeremiah finally came upon Judah

and Jerusalem, he recorded his deep distress in the book of Lamentations. Then—in contrast to the false peace of the false prophets—Jeremiah prophesied the Lord’s promised restoration (Jeremiah 33). Lamentations speaks of that hope of restoration in the following verses. Lamentations 3:21-26, 40:

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord’s loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I have hope in Him.” The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord.

Just as Jeremiah suffered and was persecuted for his obedient testimony for God and for speaking the true word of the Lord, so too, true believers who remain faithful will greatly suffer because of their testimony for Jesus (the Jesus of the Bible) and the Word of God. Likewise, I believe Scripture strongly indicates a similar end time scenario of God’s judgment on an apostate church and rebellious world (tribulation period), and then Christ’s Second Coming and promised restoration of all things.

A “Spirit” Comes on These People

Many people are being taught a “Christianized fortunetelling.” A “spirit” seems to come on them once they submit to these false prophets and their false prophecies and teachings. I have seen several that, after being confronted with the truth yet choosing to continue involvement in a group or church propagating these errors, had a visible countenance change and their hearts became hardened.

This happened to a woman I knew who had a gentle, loving spirit. She attended one of these “prophets’ schools,” and after submitting to that teaching immediately began to manifest a spirit of haughtiness and rebellion. She refused to sit down with me and go through the Scriptures on prophets and personal prophecy or attend a lecture I was giving on the topic, even though I offered her an opportunity to respond.

This woman, who previously (when I was in her favor) had given an unconditional prophecy of blessing for my life and ministry, as well as future persecution because of my obedience to the Lord and His Word, now started prophesying my destruction. She ended up becoming part of that very persecution. Unlike the prophet Nathan who confronted David and prophesied to his face (2 Samuel 12:1-14), this supposed prophet (and many others like her) cowardly prophesied my destruction to other people behind my back.

On another occasion a traveling “prophet” stopped by our ministry center. He said the Lord led him to me. After a few minutes of cordial conversation, I informed him that I believed that he and those to whom he was submitted were not speaking the words of the Lord, but were into “Christianized fortunetelling” and speaking from their own inspiration and a counterfeit spirit.

He became irate and said I was young and inexperienced. As he stood up he informed me he was going to prophesy my destruction —thinking I would be intimidated. I said, “Go ahead and prophesy my destruction. However, I want to let you know that when you are done, I am going to pray the Lord gives you a double portion of what you prophesy. Then we will see whose prophecy is fulfilled!” He refused to prophesy in my presence, but hurried out of the ministry center. As he pulled away in his motor home, he threw garbage in our parking lot.

Vague Prophecies

Much of what is being accepted as genuine prophecy today is unscriptural nonsense and is being given by those who are speaking from their own inspiration or a demonic counterfeit.

Most of the prophecies I hear today are unimpressive, powerless, and inaccurate. They are more like psychic readings or fortunetelling than biblical prophecy. Many are “safe prophecies”—so vague and general that they could be true of almost anyone, like those found in fortune cookies.

In contrast, prophecies recorded in Scripture were almost always very specific. Some were fulfilled almost immediately and others

were not fulfilled for years or even centuries, but they were precise and exact.

For example:

Then Joshua made them take an oath at that time, saying, “Cursed before the Lord is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his first-born he shall lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates (Joshua 6:26).

This specific prophecy was fulfilled generations later:

In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun (1 Kings 16:34).

Donald C. Stamps, general editor of The Full Life Study Bible stated:

Many of Jeremiah’s prophecies were fulfilled in his own lifetime (e.g., Jeremiah 16:9; 20:4; 25:1-14; 27:19-22; 28:15-17; 34:1-5); other prophecies involving the far-distant future were fulfilled later or are yet to be fulfilled (e.g., 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 31:31-34; 33:14-16).¹¹

Obedience Prophecies

There are prophecies in Scripture where blessings are promised if the word of the Lord is obeyed. Adverse consequences are promised if it is not obeyed.

Isaiah 1:19-20 states:

“If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The prophet Jeremiah gave King Zedekiah a choice. If he would obey the word of the Lord and surrender to the King of Babylon, his life would be spared, his family would live, and Jerusalem would not be burned. But if Zedekiah did not obey, then Jerusalem would be handed over to the Babylonians and burned with fire and he

would not escape (Jeremiah 38:17-18).

There is a similar prophecy in Jeremiah 42:8-18, which was given to the remnant left in Israel after the Babylonian captivity. They were told that if they stayed in the land, they would be blessed, but if they went to Egypt to reside there they would die by the sword, famine, and plague.

A Call to Repentance

Many prophecies were a call to repentance, such as Isaiah 58:1:

Cry loudly, do not hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins.

Joel 2:12-14 states:

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him...?

Jonah 1:1-2 commands:

The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amitai saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Zechariah 7:8-14 admonishes:

Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, “Thus has the Lord of hosts said, ‘Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing. They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the

Lord of hosts. And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen,” says the Lord of hosts; “but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them, so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate.”

Prophecies Must Be 100 Percent Accurate

Not only are most prophecies today usually very vague and general, they are rarely 100 percent accurate. Many rise up and proclaim: “God told me to say this. God said to go here or to do this. God showed me this is going to happen.” But it doesn’t come to pass. If a few of their prophecies are fulfilled, these are used to give them credibility, while the prophecies which were proved false are ignored or altered to conform to the circumstances.

Many supposed prophets attempt to whitewash the fact that they are not 100 percent accurate by stating something like: “A prophet is not a false prophet simply because something he/she says is inaccurate or doesn’t seem to apply to us. The prophet may be honest, righteous, and upright, yet immature in his prophesying. Missing it a few times doesn’t make one a false prophet. If it did, most preachers and teachers would do best to cease ministering as well.” But that is not scriptural. Biblical prophecies were amazingly accurate. Prophecies of impending judgment were fulfilled unless the people repented (1 Kings 21:27-29; Isaiah 38:1-8; Jeremiah 18:7-10, 26:2-6, 12-13; Jonah 3:1-10). Promises were not revoked unless the people were disobedient (1 Samuel 2:30).

Although Hananiah, the false prophet was not accurate, Jeremiah the true prophet was. Jeremiah 28:15-17 says:

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die, because you have counseled rebellion against the Lord.’” So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year in the seventh month.

Countless prophecies in Scripture validate this type of accuracy in

prophecy—not to mention the amazing fulfillment of specific Messianic prophecies. When a prophet saying, “Thus says the Lord,” is inaccurate, he had better repent. There is a tremendous difference between a pastor sharing his insight of Scripture or a counselor saying, “This is my opinion of what you should do,” or “This is the biblical counsel and advice for your situation,” and someone saying, “Thus says the Lord” or “This is God’s word to you.”

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 states:

You may say in your heart, “How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?” When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Now if we practiced what they did in Old Testament times to false prophets, we would not have so many going around saying, “Thus says the Lord.” For Deuteronomy 18:20 warns:

But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

Those who prophesy from their own inspiration will never be 100 percent accurate unless they merely give general and vague prophecies. Satan is not omniscient and therefore not 100 percent accurate, which is why so many of the predictions from those who prophesy through demonic inspiration do not come to pass either.

Isaiah 44:24-25 reveals:

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, “I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone, causing the omens of boasters to fail, making fools out of diviners, causing wise men to draw back, and turning their knowledge into foolishness.”

In contrast, Scripture says regarding Samuel, one of God’s true prophets:

Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:19-20).

1 Samuel 9:6 states:

Behold now, there is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honor; all that he says surely comes true....

New Age Channelers

I believe Satan raises up certain people and gives them false prophecies, dreams, and visions to deprecate those who genuinely hear from the Lord.

While trance-channelers communicate New Age beliefs from the spirits, many so-called prophets of God do exactly the same thing. They have become channels for deceiving spirits whose revelations are often amazingly similar to New Age teaching.

After I spoke at a church, a man told me God was continually speaking to him. However, the prophecies and revelations “this voice” was giving him were completely contrary to Scripture. If adhered to, they would actually lead Christians to accept the reign of Antichrist and be part of the prophesied apostasy.

I asked him, “What is the proof that you are really hearing from God? What scriptural validation can you provide? What specific fulfillments have occurred?” I explained to him that, “Whenever I have said the Lord has spoken to me, I can support it by God’s Word and it has always been fulfilled.” He had neither proof yet he wanted to persuade me that his revelations were from God.

Even more tragic than his personal delusion was the fact that he was attempting to influence a church, and if possible, believers throughout the U.S. I told him he needed to renounce “this voice” that was speaking to him—for it was lying, and deceiving him.

There are countless people like him who are claiming revelations, dreams, visions, and prophecies from God. Most are mere human imagination while some are influenced by demonic spirits. Most are

not only extra-biblical, but contrary to Scripture. Most have little validation of fulfillment to even consider they might be from God.

Inaccurate prophecies and unbiblical revelations are used by the enemy to discredit biblical prophecy, and to undermine what God is truly speaking by His Spirit.

It's More Like Fortunetelling

I have researched many psychics and fortunetellers, and there seems to be no apparent difference between their method of prediction and degree of accuracy and that of many so-called prophets of God today. The only difference, seemingly, is that the supposed prophet often uses "Thus says the Lord."

At a meeting where "holy laughter" was occurring, a woman stood up to give a prophetic utterance. For several minutes she rambled on to the enthusiastic receptivity of the pastor and audience. She called out many ailments that God was supposedly healing (most of which could be true for almost anyone in the audience) and none of which were documented as being healed. It sounded more like a psychic reading than biblical prophecy. She also shared for several minutes about the revelation Jesus was supposedly giving her that everyone in the room was being encompassed by light. I thought I was at a New Age gathering—not a Spirit-filled church. When she finished, those in attendance applauded.

One pastor, also known as an apostle, announced at his church that a woman prophetess was coming next week, so he invited everyone to come back for a personal prophecy. They might as well go to the local fortuneteller or psychic.

Biblical prophets did not prophesy at will, but when the word of the Lord came to them. Jeremiah 42:7 states, "Now it came about at the end of ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah." New Testament prophecy also was not determined by the whims of the person operating the gift, but as the Spirit gave utterance.

I saw the following ad in a Christian magazine: "For your personal prophecy send your name, address, and love offering." This resembles fortunetelling far more than any form of prophecy in the

Bible.

I frequently saw a large “Palm Reader” sign in the front yard of a house, and then one day, I noticed the sign was replaced by a new sign that read, “Christian Advisor—Advice on All Matters.” Will it next be changed to “Christian Prophet”?

This person probably discovered that there is a gullible market of Christians who do not want to get on their knees and into God’s Word to seek His will for their lives.

I was later informed that some Christians helped her change the sign. I hope it was a genuine conversion, but I have my doubts. It was merely a change of terminology. Even if she was converted, she had no business setting herself up that fast as a Christian consultant without time to grow and mature in the Lord.

Meetings where prophets have people line up or call them out and give them a word from the Lord, or meetings where everybody is prophesying over each other, resemble many of the occult and New Age gatherings I have researched.

With this in mind, it doesn’t surprise me that a supposed prophet of God who was giving personal prophecies at churches throughout the country stated that his wife was “at a women’s meeting one day and God got hold of her and picked her up out of the chair, supernaturally, and threw her on the floor and she was jerking; she couldn’t stop her jerk...”

I have seen accounts like this in the occult through demonic phenomena, but never of true believers in Scripture.

Putting Personal Prophecies Above God’s Word

Although most advocates will deny it, the sad reality is that they put the personal prophecies they receive above God’s Word. They are encouraged to get a recorded copy of their personal prophecies and write them out and meditate on them and read or listen to them repeatedly.

One noted prophet stated he follows his prophet mentor without

question. “Whatever he tells me to do, I do it. I am not into shepherding. I am under protection; I have a covering.” He may have a covering from that supposed prophet, but he has removed himself from under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 makes known that even if their prophecies come to pass—if they cause you to follow other gods, they are false prophets. At first I thought, “These prophets are not making anyone go after other gods. They appear to glorify Jesus Christ.” But, as I sought the Lord and His Word and researched more, I discovered that their prophecies were getting further and further away from Biblical Christianity. In too many cases they are causing people to go after other gods. They are subtly removing the God of the Bible and Christ’s Lordship from their followers’ lives and making them dependent on the prophet. They are also replacing the Word of God by encouraging the people to obey, memorize, and conform to personal prophecies and “new revelations.”

So-called prophets of God have prophesied over many separated or divorced people that their spouse would come back to them. Some of these people have waited years. Some even wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy after their former spouse has married someone else—making it unscriptural for them to reunite (Deuteronomy 24:4).

There are a growing number of casualties—people who have been hurt, confused, and misled by supposed prophets and prophetic utterances. Many of these victims have been spiritually inoculated and now want nothing to do with the real Jesus of the Bible.

Cult Awareness on “New Revelations”

It is sad to discover that what I had written many years ago about the cults concerning “new revelations” is relevant for the Church today. The following excerpts are from my former Cult Awareness booklet:

Although they say their “new revelation” merely sheds additional light on what God has already revealed through the Scriptures, in reality, it adds to or subtracts from the Bible. Ultimately, their extra-biblical revelation is given greater authority and importance

than the Bible.

It is interesting to note that most cult leaders who have received “new revelations” have acknowledged receiving them during encounters with spirit beings. A look behind the scenes will reveal a definite association with the occult and contact with demonic beings that masquerade as angelic beings, spirits of the dead, or even Christ Himself.

Now realize, a cult leader who is attempting to gain followers for his “new revelation” is usually not so naive as to immediately attempt to persuade “Christians” to accept his/her “extreme” ideas and beliefs. Instead, they will give some general truths that almost everyone agrees with and talk about God, Christ, the Bible, miracles, etc. The immature and unsuspecting listener is impressed. Very subtly the cultist reveals his “new revelation” of false doctrine mixed with just enough truth to keep you off-guard. Finally the cultist reveals that his true allegiance is to some book or teaching other than the Bible and someone other than Jesus Christ.

Cultists are usually successful in proclaiming their “new truth” to those who have little of the “old truth.” But in reality their message is not new at all. Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 states, “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, ‘See this, it is new?’ Already it has existed for ages which were before us.”

So although they claim to have God’s “new revelation” for the world, it is really just new names and disguises for Satan’s old methods of leading people away from the God of the Bible and from His revealed truth in Jesus Christ.

At a time when many New Age messiahs and prophets are attempting to gain followers for their “new revelations,” Galatians 1:8 warns, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!”¹²

Evaluate All Things in the Light of Scripture

When problems concerning issues and new teachings arose in the early New Testament Church, believers evaluated them in light of Old Testament Scripture. For example, in Acts 15:13-19, James uses Old Testament Scripture to provide the apostles' conclusion regarding the Gospel being proclaimed to the Gentiles.

So too, in these last days, we must evaluate all so-called prophecies and "new revelations" in light of God's Word. When they run contrary to Scripture, no matter how good they sound, no matter how anointed they seem, we must reject them. If we don't, we will soon be following "another Jesus," not the actual Jesus of the Bible; "a different spirit," not the true Holy Spirit; and "a different gospel," not the genuine biblical Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4).

In a personal letter my wife received from David Wilkerson, he wrote:

I never stray from the Word and I do not give much credence to much of what is called personal prophecy and new revelation. Ninety-nine percent of it is zeal without wisdom, repetitious, and absolutely nothing new except error. We are safest when we stay rock solid on the Word.

There Is a Need for Biblical Balance

1 Corinthians 14:29-33 admonishes:

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 gives us what I believe to be one of the most balanced Scriptures on prophecy. It states:

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

We have an obligation to allow the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, but a responsibility to evaluate everything by Scripture. We should hold fast to that which is good, but reject what is not in accord with God's Word.

In contradiction of the above verses, many self-proclaimed and man-appointed prophets think they are above questioning and refuse to be evaluated. They twist Scripture, manipulate followers, and make alignments with pastors and “prophets” to avoid being biblically critiqued.

These supposed modern-day prophets and apostles hinder their followers from being like the noble Bereans who not only received the word with great eagerness but also examined the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11). As a result, there is rampant false teaching under the guise of prophecies and new revelations.

Although Jesus rebuked the church of Ephesus for leaving its first love, He commended it for not tolerating evil men and putting to the test those who called themselves apostles, and were not, but were found to be false (Revelation 2:2).

I Believe in Prophecy

I believe the gift of prophecy is for today. The Church needs to be encouraged, corrected, and built up with messages from the heart of God—delivered in the power of His Spirit and by inspiration of His Word.

Genuine prophetic utterances will always be in harmony with God's written revelation, the Holy Scriptures. Prophecy is not merely foretelling future events, but often forth-telling the mind and will of God.

Revelation 19:10 informs us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Concerning true prophecy in the Church, Scripture states:

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he

is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

The sad reality is that much of what goes on in Christian circles today is not the genuine gift of prophecy. Instead of proclaiming the true word of the Lord under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we are often given a poor imitation, prophesying from one's own inspiration, or a demonic counterfeit.

Instead of “Christianized fortunetelling” the body of Christ needs those who have truly heard from the Lord and are accurately proclaiming, “Thus says the Lord.”

I admonish you not to accept as genuine a prophecy or revelation from anyone, unless it is in exact accord with God’s Word, is 100 percent accurate (or has the potential future fulfillment of being 100 percent accurate), confirms what His Spirit has already spoken to your heart, truly exalts the Jesus of the Bible, and draws you closer to Him.

Never accept prophecies and revelations as higher authority than Scripture or make anyone, except Jesus Christ, the director of your life. Do not run to others for quick prophetic advice but seek guidance from God’s Word. Be sensitive and yielded so His Spirit can speak to your heart. Spend time in prayer and fasting as you wait upon the Lord. Be led by His Spirit. Always honor Him and obey His Word.

Should Our Experience Go Beyond God's Word?

Jim Weikal has been a friend and colleague for many years, serving as Biblical Instruction Director at my ministry for over a decade and is a retired pastor. He has a strong commitment to know and defend Biblical Christianity. This chapter, therefore, was written by Jim to attest that God's Word must remain central to our experience.

An eagerness to see the Holy Spirit manifest in a mighty way has led to a faulty method of evaluation—personal experience, feelings, and emotion. As a result, multitudes of people are embracing unbiblical beliefs, practices, and phenomena.

To discern properly whether a supernatural move is from God or the adversary, we must apply the Scriptures. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

To correctly handle the Word of truth requires years of hard work—time, study, memorization, commitment, discipline, vigilance, and the like. It is written: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible is clear on the issue of faith and practice. More than seventy times the phrases “it is written” or “according to the Word” are used when the author wishes to show authority for his position.

Why do people insist on calling Jesus “Lord, Lord” and then not do what He says? Why do people say they diligently study the Scriptures and love the Lord, but when the Scriptures show no validation for much of today’s spiritual phenomena, proponents say, “This is a new move of the Spirit that goes beyond the Word of God.” They ignore the lack of biblical support.

The idea that adherence to the Word of God would offend the Holy Spirit, and therefore quench Him, is human speculation and incorrect. Extreme groups, liberal theologians, ecumenical

organizations, and others disdain the notion of biblical authority because it destroys their distorted views and spirit of compromise. Encouraging people to ignore the teachings of Scripture, they embrace “a new move of God.”

When Jesus came into the world, He did not ask the Jews if they felt He was the Messiah. He used references to prophecy:

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

He expected those listening to Him to search the Scriptures. Why should we do any differently? Has the body of Christ forgotten Paul’s admonition concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him?

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

There is an apostasy from the faith “which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). Jesus asked in Luke 18:8, “When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Jesus was speaking of faith in Him. Although many will answer “Yes,” unfortunately their faith will be in false christs, false prophets, false signs, false wonders, and false miracles!

Is the body of Christ so deficient in biblical discernment that any supernatural experience can be perceived as coming from God simply because leaders say it is, or the experience feels so good it has to be from God?

We are given in the book of Acts, chapters 2 and 4, an account of the greatest revival in New Testament times, where three thousand and five thousand were added to the church. In neither of these instances is there information given by the converts themselves of any unusual happenings.

To come against the Holy Spirit is dangerous, and I don't know of any true Christian who wants to knowingly do that. But on the other hand, I don't know of any Christian who knowingly wants to embrace a false or demonic spirit. To know the difference we must have the authority contained in the Bible.

When advocating that Scripture is the standard for evaluating spiritual matters, and not experience or feelings, many biblical references can be found:

1-a. "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." And He answered and said to them, "And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:2-3).

1-b. He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9).

To evaluate Scripture based simply on what tradition says or on some experience of the past is dangerous. Just because something occurred in the past does not automatically make it right. To refer to revivals and say, "Well it happened then, so it must be okay now," is using a faulty method of getting at the truth. For if what was done then was wrong, it is just as wrong now. Don't set aside Scripture for the sake of sensations.

2. When they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (Isaiah 8:19-20).

Even in the time of the prophet Isaiah, the law and the testimony were the standards for judging belief and practice.

3. But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4:2).

The Word of God should not have to be distorted or twisted to advance some belief or practice. Let the truth of God's Word speak to the issue and judge accordingly.

4. I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).

People who are saying that God is doing a new move (which goes beyond His Word) are standing on dangerous ground.

5. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' The Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him'" "#160;" (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

Jesus rebuked the Jews for not believing what had been written about Him.

6. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me (John 5:46).

These next two verses point to the same concept—understand what the Scriptures say and act according to their teachings:

7. Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me, and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'...Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, 'This certainly is the Prophet' " (John 7:37-40).

8. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, “GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN” (Acts 7:37).

Stephen used the Scriptures to prove his beliefs just before he was martyred (Acts 7). Paul and Stephen followed the same methodology to share biblical truth.

9. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it” (Acts 13:15).

Paul continues in Acts 13:16 by citing Jewish history and the Scriptures to show that Jesus is Israel’s Savior—the stay in Egypt, the wandering in the desert, the period of the judges and the kings, and the promise of a Savior. When Paul gets to the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, he shows how Scripture has been fulfilled by quoting from the Psalms and the Prophets. Paul used historical facts and scriptural truth to authenticate his reasoning.

We need to understand that any line of reasoning takes us down some path. If our reasoning begins with man’s experience and emotion as the basis for determining God’s truth, that path will lead to delusion. Emotion and experience are important to the spiritual life, and God wants worshipers with passion and feeling toward Him. Without a biblical starting point and scriptural “guardrails” on both sides, the believer is headed down a meandering, hazard-filled path paved with confusion, delusion, and doctrinal error.

Consider the following passages:

According to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying: “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women (Acts 17:2-4).

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to

Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:10-11).

The message of Jesus, Stephen, Paul, and other leaders of the early church is loud and clear: The Scriptures are the final authority in spiritual affairs—not feelings, emotions, intuition, past revivals, personal testimonies, prophecies, movements, or the enthusiastic crowd.

Spiritual Addiction

The following insightful chapter contains excerpts from two timely and significant articles Dr. BJ Rudge wrote for our ministry's newsletter. Read it carefully and prayerfully!

Similar to those struggling with physical addiction are those who struggle with spiritual addiction. They develop an unhealthy pattern of seeking spiritual highs through "experiences" and phenomena. They are on a spiritual "roller coaster" because their relationship with Jesus is dependent upon feelings and emotions. Instead of focusing on the revelation and truth of God's Word, they chase after dreams, visions, prophecies, and mystical experiences. Most freely admit to spending little or no time reading the Bible or praying.

Jesus used the term "deception" to describe the time before His return (see Matthew 24). Today, we often see people seeking after signs, wonders, and spiritual experiences rather than seeking after God Himself. This was exactly the case when Jesus rebuked the crowd in Galilee: "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe" (John 4:48).

In the day and age we live, it is crucial to not let "experiences" or phenomena become a substitute for time in the Word of God and prayer. Christ's Spirit, who abides in us and empowers us, cautions that in latter times some will depart from the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1). Therefore, we must exercise discernment and examine everything to determine truth from error and genuine from fake (1 John 4:1).

You can experience the peace of God, the joy of the Lord, and the power of His Spirit while avoiding the "roller coaster" of spiritual addiction. Build your faith and life on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, His immutable Word, and the leading of His Spirit. In Christ and Scripture you will find true contentment, essential discernment, and unlimited power. A deep and abiding relationship with Him supersedes anything the world, false religion, or inferior

experiences have to offer.

The Tides of Cultural Change

Sermons being promoted with sensual images, worship being infiltrated by secular songs, the preaching platform shared with “celebrities” who do not reflect biblical values—yes, these are just samples of the efforts taken by many churches to make Christianity “relevant” to our modern culture. Church growth experts tell us these “adjustments” are necessary if we want Christianity to survive the tides of cultural change. However, when we approach Christianity in the above manner, three drastic results follow.

First, Christianity becomes a human-centered system of beliefs. Like a person picking and choosing different foods at a buffet, each of us can pick and choose what we want to include in our own version of Christianity: If church is “cool” and “fun,” then we can be cool and still have fun enjoying the things of this world—a far cry from Jesus’ call of self-denial (Matthew 16:24-25).

Second, Christianity loses its power. The focus of bringing people to Christ begins to center around the latest trends and church growth methods. These are supposedly the key to unlocking the hearts of the “un-churched.” As our culture changes, these will also change so that we can maintain a message that is appealing to our audience. Definitely a different evangelistic approach than the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Third, Christianity loses its uniqueness. When the Gospel is presented with all of the regalia of cultural relevance and excitement, it loses its distinction. Instead of being a channel of transformation in our culture, it becomes transformed by the culture (see Romans 12:2). Thus, the Christian faith becomes merely another system of thought that blends into the cultural landscape. What a sad result when, in contrast, we have the opportunity to share with others the unique message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16-17).

So while we may adapt our method of presenting the Gospel, we must never change, water down, distort, or cheapen the message. We must not be so “open-minded” that we accept virtually any

practice, phenomenon, or teaching. Instead, be “Bereans” who wisely question, evaluate and discern. Any methodology that alters the Gospel message itself or compromises the way we live out our faith must be rejected. The Lord Jesus will be the final judge of all methods, techniques, and teachings, as well as those who propagate them (1 Corinthians 4:5).

False Signs and Miracles

Just like in the days of Jesus (Luke 11:29) today's generation wants to see miracles, signs, and wonders. As a result, they will follow almost any spiritual leader who promises the "miraculous."

Now there is nothing wrong with feelings, emotions, and excitement, for these can be valid responses to the genuine moving of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, we are not to quench the Spirit who desires to work in and through our lives in a real and special way. The danger arises when people begin seeking experiences, miracles, signs, and revelations more than they seek the Lord and His Word.

I certainly realize that many churches could sure use a little more excitement and enthusiasm. Some are so dead and cold that you feel as if you are at a funeral home. Other churches have gone to the opposite extreme and focus on sensationalism and emotionalism, manifesting little discernment and knowledge of God's Word. They have replaced the message of the Gospel with a "show." In too many cases the church is becoming a center for entertainment and mysticism.

Somewhere between the boring, loveless, and lifeless church, and the church that specializes in the spectacular and the sensational is the biblically balanced church. We need to allow God's Spirit to move in a dynamic and exciting way. But we must remember, the same Apostle Paul who demonstrated the thrilling power of the resurrected Christ as he evangelized new frontiers and wrote much of the New Testament, also warned against false teachers, counterfeit miracles, and the misuse of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I Believe in the Gifts of the Spirit

After I spoke at a Full Gospel banquet, a woman came up to me and said, "You are so refreshing to hear because I see so much error and deception today. It is exciting to see someone like you who believes in the gifts of the Spirit, but who is also warning about the counterfeit and the fakery going on. We need to have that kind of

balance and credibility.”

I believe in the gifts of the Spirit. I have seen genuine healings and miracles through faith in Christ. In an upcoming book entitled The Impossible, I am documenting some of the miraculous interventions the Lord has done in my life and ministry.

I have seen the genuine power and moving of God’s Spirit. I have also seen the imitation of flesh, and the demonic counterfeit. Experience oriented people, who lack discernment, and who allow phenomena to determine their beliefs instead of evaluating and lining up their experiences with the Word of God are easy prey for exploitation and counterfeit experiences which they accept as genuinely from God.

Purpose of the Spirit

One of the main purposes of the Holy Spirit is to empower God’s people to boldly and effectively witness for the truth of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8; John 15:26). The gifts of the Spirit are to exalt Jesus and draw people to Him—not focus attention on and magnify the person operating the gift. Miracles have been used by God to validate His messengers (2 Corinthians 12:12) and confirm the truth of the message being proclaimed. Acts 14:3 says:

Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders be done by their hands.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are also to exhort and strengthen the body of Christ—but not so believers can merely have a “good time” enjoying exotic, bizarre, and often, useless displays of extraordinary feats and phenomena. The Apostle Paul writes:

Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

My heart's desire is for the Holy Spirit's presence, in power, to bring deep conviction on the hearts of those hearing the proclamation of God's Word. I want to be used to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord, and to inspire them to walk in faithfulness until He returns.

The Holy Spirit convicts (exposes and convinces) the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). The Full Life Study Bible footnote on this matter states:

Through the manifestation of the Spirit among God's people, sin will be exposed, repentance called for, and sinners convicted. Where there is no exposing of unrighteousness, no conviction of sin or no plea for repentance, the Holy Spirit is clearly not at work according to the biblical pattern.¹³

Most Are a Poor Imitation or Counterfeit

When I read in Scripture the message Paul, Peter, and John proclaimed, it is far different from much of what is being heard today. Most "miracles" today don't resemble at all the miracles God performed in the early Church as recorded in Acts.

From research, studying God's Word, and knowing His voice through prayer and fasting, I must conclude that much of what is being passed off today as the Holy Spirit is a poor imitation. While some churches are experiencing a genuine move of God's Spirit, much is imitation and counterfeit. It is emotionalism, hype, the power of suggestion, psychological manipulation, mass hysteria, and psychosomatic manifestations. Some of it is outright fakery, or worse yet, a demonic counterfeit. Often, it more resembles an energy force or spirit guide than the Holy Spirit of the Bible.

Even though I have seen the Lord do some incredible things, the Church today has not yet witnessed the full outpouring of His Spirit as described in the book of Acts and in the prophecies of the second chapter of Joel. However, I believe an authentic outpouring of God's Spirit will occur globally before Jesus' Second Coming.

God will pour out His Spirit in a powerful way on believers who remain faithful to His Word, endure persecution, maintain a

testimony for the Jesus of the Bible, and who have spiritual discernment, thereby, refusing the imitation and counterfeit.

Leaders “Perform” to Keep Excitement

One of the reasons for so much nonsense in many churches is because those in leadership do not have the genuine moving of God’s Spirit, but feel tremendous pressure to “perform” to keep the church growing and excited. As a result, many pastors and leaders resort to gimmicks, emotionalism, and even bizarre behavior to generate excitement to keep followers coming.

Phillip Keller writes concerning much of these phenomena in his book, *Predators In Our Pulpits*:

The main objective is simply to satisfy the crowds. Their demand for an exciting experience...must be met. The end result is that millions of earnest, seeking souls have been given a bowl full of sensationalism but scarcely a crumb of truth. They come with searching spirits that can only be truly satisfied by the presence of the Living Christ. They go away deceived into believing that they have been touched by God’s Spirit when, in fact, it was largely a sham and show...

An even more serious dimension of their spiritual deception lies in the fact that they are often led to believe a lie. Exciting revelations, stimulating prophecies, erotic encounters (often counterfeited by false teaching), and spurious spirits lead the gullible ones...[14](#)

Usurping the Place of the Holy Spirit

Christian leaders who in any way attempt to “create” spiritual experiences for their followers must realize they are not helping God, they are usurping the place of the Holy Spirit and undermining the Gospel. They are powerless and they know it, so they turn to tricks and techniques in an attempt to impress people. However, I have traveled far and wide and have seen too many things, both in front of and behind the scenes, to be gullible and influenced by these kinds of inferior phenomena.

Many Christians are being fooled into accepting pseudo-spiritual

experiences as substitutes for the genuine outpouring of God's Spirit. All the hoopla camouflages the lack of true manifestations of the Holy Spirit and undermines authentic commitment to Jesus Christ. The external displays act as a smoke screen to conceal the lack of internal transformation by the Spirit.

It Mirrored the Shallow, Wild Times of the World

As a brand-new Christian at the age of eighteen, I got caught up in a group of some supposed super-spiritual Christians who specialized in all the signs and wonders. So-called supernatural phenomena such as healing, miracles, being slain in the Spirit, laughing and dancing in the Spirit, revelations, personal prophecies, angelic encounters, visions, casting demons out of Christians, and vomiting up demons were the norm.

Having just given up my former wild lifestyle in the world, it was most appealing to discover (or so I thought) that I could replace it with a wild lifestyle of continual miracles and the supernatural. But I soon discovered that most of the people in this group were too busy chasing the excitement and the signs and wonders to have time to seek the Lord through prayer and fasting and diligently studying His Word. As a result, they lacked the necessary spiritual discernment and Scripture knowledge to realize they were into beliefs and practices that were contrary to God's Word and definitely not of His Spirit.

Besides, their walk with the Lord was like a yo-yo. When the supposed miracles and ecstatic experiences were happening to them, they praised and served the Lord, but when they were not, they quickly fell away. Today, almost all of this group have drifted from the Lord because they built their walk on emotions, excitement, and the sensational, rather than the scriptural principles of commitment, obedience, and discipline.

I quickly realized that just as the wild parties and getting high before accepting Christ were only short-lived pleasures, so too, this hyper-emotional lifestyle did not bring the long-lasting spiritual fulfillment I desired. The only way to be totally fulfilled spiritually is to desire the Lord with all your heart, walk in fellowship with Him, and be obedient to His Word and Spirit. As a result, I would

soon witness His miraculous power, but not the carnival atmosphere of before. It would not be by my initiation or manipulation, but by His sovereign intervention.

As I reflect back on the highlights of my life and ministry, I am aware of the many miracles the Lord has done. By focusing on these miracles out of context with the rest of my life, it might seem as though I experienced constant miracles. However, sometimes I went for months or even more than a year through a wilderness where God molded and trained me without any apparent supernatural intervention. In the same way, if you take Scripture out of context when looking at the lives of Daniel, Moses, Elijah, Paul, and others, it may seem like they had constant miracles. The total picture, however, shows this not to be true.

Psychosomatic and False Healings

To maintain integrity in the body of Christ, I must also say that many claiming to have a healing ministry are merely doing psychosomatic healings—not genuine divine healing.

A world-famous evangelist spoke for over two hours yet quoted only a few Scriptures. The rest of the time he talked about his experiences and his vision from the Lord. The affirmative statements he had everyone repeat as a confession of being blessed were almost like chanting, and many in the audience seemed to be in an altered state of consciousness—almost a trance-like state—as they repeated them.

During the altar call he had those who came forward raise both of their hands high in the air. Then he would hit them on their foreheads. Some wobbled and a few fell down. There were also some supposed healings, but they were merely psychosomatic. The two that were in wheelchairs left unchanged, as did all the others who had visible afflictions.

I heard another popular evangelist who frequently bragged about his healing ministry. At a national convention I attended, there were many supposed healings but, again, they were psychosomatic. A woman who was brought in on an ambulance cot and others with obvious medical conditions left the same way they came.

The national secretary of a well-respected movement in India with over two thousand churches told me that he never saw one genuine healing in India by all the so-called popular healing evangelists that came through. He told me that an American evangelist had a large healing crusade in India. Thousands of dollars were spent on posters, advertising, and feeding people after the services to draw big crowds. He was aware of several people in India who were paid to come and fake healings and then testify how they were healed.

The evangelist told people to raise one hand if they had any prayer requests. At that very moment his staff took photographs to bring back to the U.S. claiming these people were in the process of giving their lives to Jesus. Then he would ask them to raise both hands, photograph them with their hands in the air, and claim to his supporters that these people were praising the Lord.

The national secretary said to me, “A militant Hindu group brought ten blind and crippled people and told this evangelist they would give ten thousand U.S. dollars if he healed just one of them, but the evangelist would not even pray for them.” (Why didn’t he tell them to keep their money, but he would still pray?)

The national secretary said he saw no lasting fruit from these pseudo-miracle crusades. All the people wanted was the excitement —very few wanted true salvation.

Many people are becoming hostile to the Gospel because of the fakery they see in Jesus’ name. If we are going to win a skeptical world to Christ we must do so with integrity and the true anointing of His Spirit.

At a crusade in Nigeria, an apostle over several churches prayed loudly and emotionally with those who came forward. He pushed on their heads and most of them fell over backwards, supposedly falling under the power of God. It was soon proven, however, to be all emotion and hype. Right after a teenage girl was “slain in the Spirit,” a ten-year-old blind girl with no eyes in her sockets was brought up for prayer for a healing. After this apostle yelled and hollered and pushed on her head, guess what happened? Nothing! She left the same way she came.

The same Spirit, which had allegedly knocked down all those people, surely could have restored this girl's eyesight. But God's Spirit was not moving. It was merely hype and emotion.

I have witnessed this happen over and over. Sure, there are many claims of healings—but either the claims were not verifiable, or the healings were merely psychosomatic. I have yet to discover even one legitimate healing of the caliber of Jesus, Paul, or Peter to be accomplished by faith healers who resort to unbiblical phenomena and techniques. In fact, the ones operating this supposed gift from God almost always avoid the people who obviously need a real supernatural touch from the Lord if they are going to truly be healed.

However, the time is coming when God is going to pour out His Spirit and amazing healings and miracles will occur. But Scripture also prophesies that false prophets and false messiahs are going to perform great signs and counterfeit miracles (Matthew 24:24). So, once again, the only way to know what is of God, the flesh, or the devil will be to have discernment from studying God's Word and spending time in prayer and fasting.

Compare Today's Show with Our Lord's Example

While imitators perform “miracles” to impress people, Jesus did miracles out of compassion and to the glory of God. His miracles were a sign and validation of His message and Messianic claims. Jesus and the apostles did not go around merely healing invisible ailments such as headaches, joint pain, and so on. They healed visible organic maladies and injuries—blind eyes, withered hands, crippled limbs, paralysis, leprosy, a severed ear, and the like. They even raised the dead. Those healed in Scripture did not have to confess, claim, or visualize for days or weeks their healing before it occurred. The healings of Jesus were usually immediate, complete, irreversible, and undeniable, even to His opponents and critics.

When we think of the “miracles” performed by today's faith healers, could we honestly say what Nicodemus said to Jesus:

Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him (John

3:2).

How about Paul in Lystra, when God used him to heal a man “who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother’s womb, who never had walked” (Acts 14:8). The crowds were so impressed with Paul’s undeniable miracle that they exclaimed, “The gods have become like men and have come down to us” (Acts 14:11). You can read more about this amazing account and what led to Paul’s stoning and apparent resurrection in Acts, chapter 14.

Those whom God is really using today in supernatural healings do very little boasting about it. You will not find them advertising their gift in Christian magazines or on radio, television, or the Internet. They are serving the Lord in places and ways through which they will probably not get much worldly credit. One day they will receive the Lord’s reward for their faithfulness and for allowing His power to be manifested through their lives—without attempting to use it to exalt themselves, advance their own ministries, or obtain financial gain.

Prayer Cloths and Handkerchiefs

Dr. BJ Rudge shares some helpful insights in this section on prayer cloths and handkerchiefs.

In Acts 19:11-12 we read that God performed “extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul” to the extent that even Paul’s handkerchiefs and aprons were used to heal people. Unfortunately, many have misapplied this passage. The following are a few thoughts to consider.

First: The extraordinary way in which God worked through Paul was relevant to the audience that Paul was directing his missionary efforts. Ephesus was a city known for its magic arts and supernatural occurrences. God’s Spirit performed miracles through Paul that demonstrated Jesus’ power over demonic powers. In contrast, in cities like Athens, where the orientation was to the philosophical, there are no miracles reported, but Paul’s presentation of the Gospel was tailored to the speculative bent of his listeners. This may provide us with our principle. The Gospel confronts human beings where they are spiritually. Where there is

demonism and sorcery, the Holy Spirit may act to demonstrate the lordship of Jesus. Where there is moral and mental darkness, the Spirit may act through the holy lives of God's people and the simple message of the Gospel to demonstrate that in Jesus there is a better way. This point highlights once again that the miraculous events of Acts 19:11-12 were specifically performed by Paul for the people of Ephesus. Since the Ephesians lived in a city known for its magic arts and sorcery, God empowered Paul to perform miraculous acts in Ephesus that would demonstrate the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Second: These miracles performed by Paul are not normative (standard for how God normally works) but are unique (or as Luke says in Acts "extraordinary") acts by God, specific to the situation found in Acts chapter 19. The Greek word tuchon (extraordinary) can be better translated "not common" or "special." Throughout the New Testament, we find only two other instances of similar miracles: Peter's shadow (Acts 5:15) and Jesus' garment (Mark 5:27-34; 6:56). Also, realize that Paul goes to numerous cities where there is no record of him performing any miracles (Pisidian Antioch, Athens, Berea, Corinth, and Thessalonica). This should show us that the events of Acts 19 are unique/special/not common in nature.

Third: It should be noted that God performed these miracles only through Paul. Nowhere in the book of Acts do we see God working these specific miracles through other believers in the same way that He did through Paul in Ephesus. This should not be surprising since Paul was God's chosen instrument to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Paul was empowered in unique and extraordinary ways to demonstrate that his authority came from God Almighty. One should be extremely cautious of attributing to himself/herself "extraordinary" events that God chose to do through the Apostle Paul.

Fourth: The main purpose of these miracles was to authenticate or confirm the message of the Apostle Paul. As we continue to read chapter 19, we see that many people came to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as they turned from their former way of living (vss. 18-20). These miracles demonstrated to the Ephesians the power and truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which in turn would

bring them to repentance. The miracles were never intended to draw people to Paul. Rather, they were used to point the Ephesians to Jesus Christ, who alone deserves all glory, honor, and praise.

Although Acts 19:12 cannot be used to support the use and sale of “prayer cloths and handkerchiefs,” one can be assured that God does work today through supernatural means. He uses healings and miracles to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel message. When God chooses to perform extraordinary miracles today, we would expect at least the following to be present:

1. These miracles would point people exclusively to Jesus Christ.
2. These miracles would most likely occur in an area, like ancient Ephesus, which was dominated by the occult and magic.
3. These miracles would lead to a true spiritual revival where we would see people repenting of their evil ways and turning to faith in Christ, as happened in Ephesus (Acts 19:18-20).

The church today has lost true spiritual power as it seeks after cheap imitations. Therefore, believers need to get back to the basic principles that made the early church in the book of Acts a powerful witness for Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:42-43). By devoting oneself to the study of God’s word, pursuing a life of prayer, and walking in the Spirit, perhaps the church today, as in the book of Acts, will see the authentic display of God’s miraculous power.

“Slain in the Spirit”

As a new Christian I was very open to being “slain in the Spirit,” but I was not the type who would be pushed down or fall on my own. Some who had this phenomenon manifest in their ministries would lay hands on me, expecting the power of God to knock me down. A few had me close my eyes and raise my hands and then pushed hard against my forehead, but I never went down. Those who endorse this phenomenon might say, “Well, you did not go down because you resisted.” That is not true; I was very open to it. I am just not easily influenced or manipulated by such emotionalism and phenomena.

If it really were the power of God’s Spirit which had “slain” these

people, then He could also drop them unhurt to the floor without the need for catchers. And they should get up being genuinely healed or delivered.

David Wilkerson said it well:

If people are going to fall down, I want to see them falling under the conviction of the Holy Ghost. And the vision I want them to receive is a renewed vision of Jesus. And the manifestation I want them to have is their rising from the floor as a new creature in Christ!¹⁵

In Scripture, believers fell on their faces in awe and worship before the Lord (Abraham—Genesis 17:1-3; Joshua 5:13-15; Ezekiel 1:28; 3:23; 43:1-5; 44:4; Daniel 8:15-18, 27; 10:7-11; disciples at the transfiguration—Matthew 17:5-6; John’s vision of the glorified Christ—Revelation 1:17; angels and elders fell on their faces and worshiped God—Revelation 7:11; 11:16-17). The experience happened directly between God and the individual—no human being had to lay hands on them, and none fell after being lined up and blown on.

Even the book that deals extensively with end time prophecy (Revelation) nowhere states anything about being “slain in the Spirit.” Even when one was in the very presence of God, there is no such phenomenon mentioned. However, there are several accounts in Revelation of His people who by their own volition fall on their faces to worship Him in awe and reverence (Revelation 4:9-10; 7:11; 11:16).

Stand On Your Feet

Those who experience being “slain in the Spirit” usually fall backward, which contradicts all biblical accounts for believers. Only in such cases as when Jesus said, “I am He,” to the unbelieving soldiers who were arresting Him did they draw back and fall to the ground.

The scriptural accounts which proponents use to endorse “slain in the Spirit” are taken out of context. Besides, scriptural records indicate that the Lord often tells those overwhelmed by His

presence and who have fallen on their faces to get up so He can speak to them—not lay there for several minutes to several hours doing “carpet time” while the Lord supposedly speaks and ministers to them. The following examples of Scripture bear this out:

Ezekiel 1:28 - 2:2:

As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking. Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!” As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me.

Ezekiel 3:23-24:

So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face. The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me....

Matthew 17:6-7:

When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.”

Also see Ezekiel 43:1-5; Daniel 8:15-18; 10:7-11; and Acts 9:3-8.

There is no record in Scripture of believers “falling under the power of the Spirit” when Jesus or the apostles laid hands on them and prayed for them. Yet in many circles people line up to have hands laid on them in order to receive this euphoric experience.

I have seen many people “slain in the Spirit”—some even at churches while I was ministering or praying for them, but it was not my doing or the Spirit’s. I am not saying their hearts or motives were impure, but the reasons for its occurrence are many and varied including predetermining before the meeting they would be “slain,” equilibrium problem, loss of balance due to eyes being

closed and hands raised, power of suggestion, being conditioned and programmed, mind control, mass hypnosis, and even sometimes demonic manifestation (the possession-trance state of shamanism).

It is obvious from extensive research, the associated phenomena and teachings that often happen along with it, and evaluating Scripture in context, being “slain in the Spirit” as it occurs in many Christian circles is not scriptural.

Most can only give their experience as proof that it is from God. However, when proponents venture to give Scripture to validate being “slain in the Spirit,” once they are examined in context, it is evident that what is happening today is as far removed from the biblical accounts as a backyard carnival is from Disneyland.

“Close Encounters” in Toronto

A missionary couple I met while ministering in Haiti had attended a church in Toronto when the “holy laughter” first began to manifest. They told me they were greatly confused by this unscriptural phenomenon, but were unable to voice their opinion lest they be considered unspiritual. When I asked them if they felt what was going on there was of God, the flesh, or demonic, they quickly replied, “Much of it was demonic.”

A team of us (some who were raised in and attend Pentecostal and Charismatic churches) visited the Toronto church and by then it had progressed beyond uncontrollable laughter and weeping, to people being “drunk in the Spirit,” staggering, struck dumb, and stuck like glue. We witnessed people doing every imaginable contortion, twitching, and jerking movement. Many of them fell backwards in ecstatic trances or their bodies shook violently out of control. While the speaker was trying to preach, we heard gut-wrenching groans, shrieks, warrior cries, animal noises, and a garbled “prophecy” by a pastor’s wife who acted like a wild woman shaking, jerking, and swirling her head around in quick spasmotic motions. Parts of the service resembled a voodoo ritual, people on drugs, or a psychiatric ward more than a Spirit-filled service. To think that tens of thousands of people and pastors had visited this place...many to take the “blessing” back to their churches.

When I returned from Toronto, my Bible study just happened to appropriately include 2 Timothy 4:1-5 which says:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things....

“Holy Laughter”

Just as there is no real scriptural support for being “slain in the Spirit,” there is no scriptural basis for the phenomenon called “holy laughter.”

I am all for “the joy of the Lord” (Nehemiah 8:10), and am well aware that “a joyful heart is good medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). There is nothing wrong with laughing and being joyful. “Holy laughter,” however, is a diabolical deception.

“Holy Ghost bartenders” served the “new wine” of “holy laughter” and encouraged people to “belly-on-up to the bar.” Adherents were told to surrender to the laughter (I thought we should only surrender to the Lord) and just “let go.”

People fell on the floor and convulsed in uncontrollable laughter or giggling—sometimes for hours. Some laughed hysterically while others cried. Some rolled around on the floor. Some danced “sensually” while some men fell and laid on women or women on men. Others had out-of-body experiences and claimed to have seen visions or angels. I also saw participants (many being pastors) jerking, shaking violently, roaring like lions, barking like dogs, and hissing and writhing like snakes—definite occult phenomena. Hours later, some staggered out of the church or laughed uncontrollably while driving down the road or eating at restaurants.

These bizarre phenomena were fed by a major misconception and

twisting of Scripture—that being filled with the Spirit produces the same effect on a person as being drunk on wine.

The irrational behavior described above has absolutely no scriptural basis. In fact, Ephesians 5:18, one of the passages used most often in support of this kind of experience, actually means the exact opposite of what is being propagated.

Immature and biblically illiterate Christians have been erroneously led to believe that because this text says that Christians should not get drunk on wine, but should be filled with the Spirit, that it means “don’t get drunk on wine, get drunk on the Spirit.” However, based on research done as part of an exegetical study in the original Greek language on Ephesians 5:18 and 19, David Sabella concludes:

When the verse is examined within its scriptural context and with an understanding of the historical and cultural background into which it was written, it is obvious that Paul is here calling for sobriety and not intoxication of any kind. He is commanding the Church not to worship as the hellenistic cultists. Once drunk on wine, they would work themselves into a degrading and orgiastic state to worship the false pagan god Dionysus. Paul is contrasting their trumped-up, wine-induced frenzies of religious exaltation with the sober, orderly, and controlled worship that being filled with the Spirit brings. The meaning of being filled with the Spirit, therefore, is not to get “drunk in the Spirit,” but rather the very opposite. It is a call to discipline and self-control. These two ideas are mutually incompatible, not similar.¹⁶

The Interpreter’s Bible states it this way:

The antithesis is not between wine and spirit but between the two states—intoxication with its degrading effects on the one hand; and a [sober] progressive fulfillment of the spiritual life on the other.¹⁷

Why Not “Drunk” in Acts 2:15 and Ephesians 5:18?

A highly speculative and faulty interpretation of being “drunk in the Spirit,” based on taking Acts 2:15 and Ephesians 5:18 out of context, resulted in a blatant false teaching.

Consider Acts 2:15. Ten days after Christ's ascension, while the 120 were praying and worshiping the Lord in an upper room in Jerusalem, a mighty rushing wind came and tongues of fire rested on the heads of the 120. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. So why did some in the crowd think the 120 were drunk?

Notice, it was not because they were staggering, falling down, or laughing uncontrollably in an inebriated state. The answer given in Acts 2:5-13 is this:

Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

Why was most of the multitude of devout men from every nation bewildered and amazed? Because they heard foreigners declaring the wonders of God, in their own tongues (Acts 2:5-12).

Notice, it was the mockers who said they had too much wine (Acts 2:13). The mockers, not the multitude, falsely accused the others of being drunk because, while some heard their own language, they also heard other languages. To the mockers this sounded like babbling, but the others were amazed and marveled (Acts 2:7, 12).

Also notice that Peter was able to preach a very accurate and powerful message (Acts 2:14-40)—something he could not have done if he had been inebriated.

Remember that those who were gathered were devout and God-fearing Jews who would not have listened to Peter if they thought he was drunk. Not only did they listen, many believed what he said and repented. In fact, following Peter's powerful message (which incidentally was filled with meaningful scriptural content that appealed to reason) three thousand repented and were baptized (Acts 2:41).

Contrast this event with people who are “drunk in the Spirit”—who have difficulty testifying about what God has done for them and who often cannot speak, walk, or stand. Is this the fruit of the same Spirit who visited these men at Pentecost? Certainly not!

Furthermore, the testimonies given by proponents of “holy laughter” revolve around their experiences rather than around Jesus Christ and Scripture as Peter's sermon did.

Peter answered the mockers, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose” (Acts 2:15). He added, “But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

Joel 2:28-32 (which Peter quoted from) states:

It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered....

While many foolishly said, “Have a drink at Joel's place,” Joel does not mention or suggest that drunken behavior is a sign of the outpouring of God's Spirit. Furthermore, there is no example anywhere in the New Testament of believers being “drunk in the Spirit.” In fact, a fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:23) while one of the deeds of the flesh is drunkenness (Galatians 5:21).

Ephesians 5:18 says:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit in this passage does not imply that one will experience some euphoric state of mind resulting in drunken behavior; quite the contrary, it is the antithesis of it. In the context of Ephesians 5, being filled with the Spirit means you are to let the Spirit so totally control you that you will live a life of obedience and discipline. This text in no way gives sanction to drunken-like behavior, of the so-called “drunk in the Spirit” enthusiasts.

The Wine of God’s Wrath

“Intoxicating wine” and drunken behavior are often used in Scripture to signify God’s wrath and judgment on a rebellious people:

Jeremiah 13:13-14:

Then say to them, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land—the kings that sit for David on his throne, the priests, the prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness! I will dash them against each other, both the fathers and the sons together,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will not show pity nor be sorry nor have compassion so as not to destroy them.’ ”#160;”

Jeremiah 25:15-16:

For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, says to me, “Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.”

Jeremiah 25:27-29:

You shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall and rise no more because of the sword which I will send among you.’ And it will be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you will say to them, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘You shall surely drink! For behold, I

am beginning to work calamity in this city which is called by My name, and shall you be completely free from punishment? You will not be free from punishment; for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth,' declares the Lord of hosts."

Jeremiah 51:7:

Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are going mad.

Isaiah 51:17:

Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who have drunk from the Lord's hand the cup of His anger; the chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs.

Ezekiel 23:32-33:

Thus says the Lord God, "You will drink your sister's cup, which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision; it contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria."

Revelation 14:8:

And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

Revelation 17:1-2, 6:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus....

Be Sober and on Guard

Anyone tempted to leave his mind at the door and “belly-on-up to the bar,” needs to remember that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth. In order to receive truth the mind cannot be bypassed. When you release yourself to a mindless, intoxicated state, you are setting yourself up for vain imaginations or demonic delusions. You compromise your God-given responsibility to live soberly under the control of His Spirit. You surrender your biblical mandate to walk in discernment, wisdom, and understanding.

God is a God of order, not chaos. Just look around at His incredible creation. There is design, order, harmony, and restrained power. Compare this to the chaotic mess of the “drunken and disorderly conduct” of the “drunk-in-the-Spirit” crowd. You be the judge of who is the author of this confusion.

Consider this: Proponents of “holy laughter” and “being drunk in the Spirit” may be right when they say God is the one causing these phenomena to happen. We are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 that God will send a strong delusion upon those who do not love the truth. It is becoming increasingly evident based on the recent phenomena crazes, “new revelations,” and current trends that are so quickly being embraced by, and welcomed into the church, that many do not have a love for the truth of God’s Word!

Being “drunk in the Spirit” is definitely not a sign of the outpouring of God’s Spirit. It is a fleshly, sometimes demonic behavior—often God’s judgment on unbelievers and apostates.

Whatever Happened to the Word of God?

Returning to my observations regarding the “holy laughter” phenomenon that swept the church and the resulting bizarre behavior, let me add that it was not uncommon to see people lying flat on the floor as though they were stuck there with glue. In fact, proponents claimed that being unable to move or rise from the floor was caused by “Holy Ghost glue.” Nowhere can we find the basis for this in the New Testament church. Being demonically controlled or frozen with fear is commonly manifested in the occult.

Although proponents of “holy laughter” admitted that these phenomena were very distracting and made what is being said from

the pulpit irrelevant, they believed it was God who was doing the distracting so it was okay. However, 1 Corinthians 14:33 plainly states, “for God is not a God of confusion but of peace....” According to Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, “confusion” (akatastasia), “denotes a state of disorder, disturbance, tumult.” First Corinthians 14:40 states, “But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

Proponents of “holy laughter” claimed to be receiving a new anointing accompanied by joy and a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They testified of having some of the most powerful services they ever experienced—changed lives and transformed congregations. Many claimed renewed faith, marriages, and ministries.

The sad reality is that the fruit of all this unbiblical nonsense led to many church and ministry scandals, confused and split congregations, ruined lives and marriages, and a watching world once again repulsed by unscriptural phenomena and behavior in Christ’s name.

Those who endorsed “holy laughter” and related phenomena seldom gave Scripture to support their beliefs. If any Scripture references were given, they were taken out of context and given a twisted meaning. They gave a subjective reason—I experienced it, therefore it must be of God. Resorting to “human wisdom,” they set aside the Word of God. Having no scriptural basis, proponents of “holy laughter” claimed that God was doing a new work in His church that goes beyond the Word of God.

Those drawn to these types of emotionally-driven services and ecstatic experiences were very often discouraged and depressed pastors or Christians who were burnt-out and felt powerless in their fruitless ministries. They turned to “holy laughter” and other strange, non-scriptural phenomena and teachings to revitalize their lives and ministries.

I wonder where their relationship was with the Christ of the Scriptures and their spiritual discernment, since many previously claimed to be Spirit-filled. How could such an inferior experience so powerfully affect and then shipwreck so many leaders in the

church? Pastors and believers, hungry for the outpouring of God's Spirit, are becoming impatient and inadvertently accepting emotional and counterfeit experiences.

Many extreme groups started with people who got into false teaching by basing their beliefs on subjective experience rather than the Word of God. For example, a deeply religious man who taught Sunday school and read the Bible through once a year was unsure whether his psychic abilities came from God or the devil. As a result of a personal experience, and with the urging of his family and friends, he began doing psychic healings. The result was a lifelong commitment to occult beliefs and phenomena which ended in physical, emotional, and spiritual devastation.

Also consider, much of the phenomena in Scripture that is often attributed to the demonic (struck dumb and unable to speak, uncontrollable shaking and convulsions, thrown around like a rag doll) was occurring to Christians and pastors.

Instead of reaching the world as the Lord's return draws closer, the "church" was laughing uncontrollably, rolling around on the floor in convulsions, and struck dumb, unable to speak. In the case of Zacharias, it was because of unbelief that he was unable to speak until the birth of his son (Luke 1:20, 63-64).

However, the church is not laughing so much now as hard times have affected almost every believer, and persecution on a worldwide scale is accelerating.

The Glory Fades

While ministering in Southern California several years after the "holy laughter" craze was fading, I wanted to know what the movement and its leader were doing. During a break in my schedule, I attended a five-hour service by the leader of the "holy laughter" movement.

There were many unbiblical manifestations and phenomena, as well as completely twisted words of Scripture. For example, when someone was laid out flat on the floor, supposedly struck by the Holy Spirit, the person rolled over. The leader quipped, "You may

wonder what's happening, but God does not want us to be 'rare' or 'medium.' God wants us to be 'well done' on both sides, so we can be a 'well done, good and faithful servant.' " "#160;"

Other attendees at the meeting were literally struck dumb when they came forward to give testimony or to be prayed over. Many fell and were stuck like glue to the floor, much to the amusement of the audience and the leader. The leader said this is the prophesied revival sweeping the world. However, this hyper-emotional meeting was unimpressive and pathetic. It only reinforced how far some elements under the cloak of Christianity have gone in perverting the truth of the Bible.

Very different from New Testament Christianity and the power of God's Spirit manifested in the book of Acts.

A husband and wife told me about an evangelist who spoke at their church and advertised that there would be signs, wonders, and miracles. I asked this couple to give me examples of signs, wonders, and miracles in the Bible. They gave me an impressive listing. Then I asked, "And what signs, wonders, and miracles actually occurred through this evangelist?" They quickly acknowledged that his in no way even remotely compared to or resembled the biblical accounts.

"Peace" Is Blissed-Out Meditative Trance

Proponents of "holy laughter" and related phenomena misused Scripture. Their method of biblical interpretation was faulty because they took verses out of context. Using their method I could easily take every text dealing with the word "peace" and, by their reasoning, justify the Eastern phenomenon of the "blissed-out meditative trance" and claim it is the work of the Holy Spirit. I could then go around the world conducting "holy peace" crusades and by my "holy touch" zap people into a nirvana-like state.

Why stop there? I could take the scriptural references regarding bodily translation, like Enoch when he was translated into heaven, and Philip when he was translated out of the presence of the Ethiopian eunuch, and have people line up to have hands laid on them to be translated into heaven, another room, or another country.

Read All the Scriptures

The Scriptures given by “holy laughter” proponents (Job 5:22; 8:21; Psalm 16:11; 37:12-13; 126:1-2; Proverbs 15:13; Nehemiah 8:10; Acts 2:28; 3:19; and so forth) appeared on the surface to be biblical. Yet when each passage was checked in context, it was obvious they had been twisted and misapplied.

In these last days it is crucial that those who endorse such things as “holy laughter” and being “drunk in the Spirit” should also read a few more Scriptures.

Luke 21:34-36:

Be on guard so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Romans 13:12-14:

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

1 Peter 4:7:

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

1 Peter 5:8:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Jeremiah 51:37-39:

“Babylon will become a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and hissing, without inhabitants. They will roar together like young lions, they will growl like lions’ cubs. When they become heated up, I will serve them their banquet and make them drunk, that they may become jubilant and may sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake up,” declares the Lord.

Lay Hands on No Man Suddenly

First Timothy 5:22 states, “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.” So too, we must be cautious whom we permit to lay hands on us. Once you go up front for an evangelist, prophet, or apostle to pray for you, you have submitted to them. You are now vulnerable to be influenced by what, or who they represent. If they are propagating non-biblical beliefs or techniques, or demonic powers, that could be as potentially dangerous as submitting to someone in an occult meeting.

I believe that Christians who submit to being “drunk in the spirit,” “holy laughter,” and other unbiblical, often times occult phenomena, are in the same spiritual danger as those who attend séances or play with Ouija boards. Many have experienced the same physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual oppression that those who dabble in the occult eventually do.

It is also interesting that the same spirit I encountered through spiritual warfare and confronting witches, spiritualists, psychics, mediums, and New Agers for twenty years, is now manifest in the church.

Resembles Hindu Occultism

The phenomena of being “slain in the Spirit” and “holy laughter” are about as impressive and scriptural as Guru Maharaj Ji’s techniques, which supposedly enabled his adherents to see the “Divine light of God,” hear the “Divine music of God,” feel the “Word of God in their flesh,” and taste the “Divine nectar of God.”

According to researcher Ellis Stewart’s article on Hindu Occultism:

The most feared and revered deity in Hinduism is the goddess Kali (Durga), the wife of Shiva the destroyer. She is also known as Shakti, which means “force,” and represents the impersonal force that occultism teaches runs the universe. The divine power-touch of the guru is called shaktipat. This is a term used for the touch (or near touch) of a guru’s hand to the worshiper’s forehead that produces supernatural effects. Shakti literally means power; and in administering the shaktipat the guru becomes a channel of primal power, the cosmic power (so they believe) underlying the universe. The supernatural effect of shakti through the guru’s touch may knock the worshiper to the floor or he may see a bright light and receive an experience of enlightenment or inner illumination, or have some other mystical or psychic experience.¹⁸

Pastor Catapulted from Chair

A magazine article by proponents of “holy laughter” boasted of a pastor, who while quietly weeping and worshiping, was suddenly catapulted from his chair. He flew through the air nearly ten feet down the aisle, landing on his face. If this were really so, does it even remotely resemble the Holy Spirit in the Bible? However, it does resemble demonic manifestations in the occult.

While talking to some leaders at the church in Toronto promoting the “Toronto blessing,” I asked, “How far can these phenomena go before you say ‘enough is enough?’” One of them immediately responded, “You are being judgmental. This conversation is terminated.” I replied, “I am not being judgmental. I am just trying to find a biblical basis for your endorsement of this supposed outpouring of God’s Spirit.” But they refused to even discuss it.

On another occasion, a man I know who was at one time in leadership at his church, was physically escorted out of the church because he questioned the pastor concerning the scriptural basis of his teaching. There also have been many prophecies and pronouncements of destruction on those who oppose—and sometimes on those who merely don’t go along with—their aberrant teachings and practices.

The Israelites of Gideon’s day had become so corrupt they were going to kill Gideon because he had broken down Baal’s altar and

had cut down the Asherah pole beside it (Judges 6:30). Are “Christian” leaders today becoming so corrupt that not only do they tolerate energy forces and familiar spirits masquerading as the Holy Spirit, but they seek to destroy, through prophetic utterance or other means, those who biblically expose (“cut down”) the unbiblical phenomena in the church?

In the occult, the main focus is subjective experience and phenomena, with little regard for doctrine and truth. Ironically, the church today focuses on feelings and experiences that make you feel good with little concern for scriptural truth.

It Is a Sad Day

It is sad indeed that those for whom Christ died and whom He has called to be His Bride are so far removed from Biblical Christianity. Many have become spiritual prostitutes. Once I dreamed the Lord was speaking through me to a group of people who were embracing false teaching and phenomena. I said to them: “How diabolical that something which is not even in Scripture is causing so many church splits, divisions, and turmoil in the body of Christ.” Historically, most heresies and divisions in the church have started with at least some aspect of Scripture. But much error today has absolutely no basis in God’s Word, yet it divides many churches.

Christians who embrace subjective experiences rather than the objective, inspired Word of God will consequently involve themselves in even more bizarre manifestations they attribute to the Holy Spirit. Some of this behavior in these last days, I am convinced, will involve outright sexual immorality and blatant demonic activity around the very altar of the sanctuary. Unless they repent they will suffer dire consequences as they find the Lord “making war against them with the sword of His mouth” (Revelation 2:16).

God sent Judah into Babylonian captivity because the people and leaders would not respond to His discipline and instruction but turned their backs to Him and set up their abominations in the house that bears His name and defiled it (Jeremiah 32:32-34). Far worse today are pastors and leaders who defile the Church which He redeemed with His blood, by allowing New Age, occult practices

and techniques—and believers' bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit, to participate in detestable phenomena and practices.

Reflects the Occult More than the Scriptural Norm

Many claim that various phenomena such as falling down, laughing, shaking, jerking, and jumping up and down uncontrollably, convulsions, feelings of warmth and electricity, and other such experiences occur when the Holy Spirit comes on a person.

However, these behaviors and sensations far more resemble self-induced experiences or the occult than they represent the norm in Scripture of God's Spirit moving in a person's life.

The Holy Spirit "is not energy or electricity or anything that any human being can pump, scoop, blow, charge with, or press into another person. The Holy Spirit is God. Even when we speak of the 'power' of the Holy Spirit, this is not some energy.... [Energy] is a New Age concept, not a biblical one."¹⁹

The desire to turn off the mind, lose control of oneself, and have euphoric experiences are primary characteristics of occultism and Eastern mysticism—not Biblical Christianity. For example, in an issue of Spiritual Counterfeits Project Newsletter, a quote was included from the book, *The Stormy Search for the Self*, in which the New Age authors state:

During powerful rushes of Kundalini energy, [individuals] often emit various involuntary sounds, and their bodies move in strange and unexpected patterns. Among the most common manifestations...are unmotivated and unnatural laughter or crying...and imitating a variety of animal sounds and movements.²⁰

You might say, "The atmosphere was positive and very exciting, and everyone seemed warm and friendly. I felt great and so close to the Lord that it had to be the Holy Spirit." Well, I have been in many occult and New Age meetings and believe me, they are very positive. There is electricity in the air and there is a great excitement and expectancy of what "God" is going to do.

The former Oregon guru, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, was often

referred to as being “drunk on the divine.” He would draw his followers to himself and ask them to “drink” from him. His spiritual “wine” could be obtained by merely a touch of his hand to the head. After his touch many would fall to the floor in ecstasy.²¹

Ramakrishna, an Indian saint, daily went into “samadhi,” a trancelike stupor, “in which one involuntarily falls down unconscious and enters a rapturous state of super-conscious bliss (ananda)... These states could last anywhere from a few minutes to several days and were often accompanied by uncontrollable laughter or weeping. He could send others into this state with a single touch to the head or chest.”²²

Swami Baba Muktananda “would transfer what was called ‘guru’s grace’ to his followers through Shaktipat (physical touch). This ‘grace’ triggered the gradual awakening of the Kundalini which in turn produced various physical and emotional manifestations. Manifestations included uncontrollable laughing, roaring, barking, hissing, crying, shaking, etc. Some devotees became mute or unconscious. Many felt themselves being infused with feelings of great joy and peace and love. At other times the ‘fire’ of Kundalini was so overpowering they would find themselves involuntarily hyperventilating to cool themselves down.”²³

During the 1960s and 1970s, the massive influence of Eastern mysticism and occult practices drew the Western world into a feelings-oriented frenzy. Devotees rejected the cold orthodoxy of the established church for the more subjective emotional experience of gurus and shamans. No longer was validation based on the external, objective Word of God, but rather on internal, subjective impulses. Reason was cast aside like some old tattered garment. The cultural cry of that age, “If it feels good—do it,” penetrated the church.

But how you feel can never be the ultimate criterion for evaluating phenomena and experiences. Proper interpretation of Scripture, or in other words, “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), is where we must always begin and end in determining how we walk in this world, which will offer an increasing plethora of mystical experiences until Christ returns.

Do Not Be Impressed by Phenomena...

We hear much about signs, wonders, and miracles but very little about the need for the necessity of developing discernment. So-called miracles, healings, prophecies, revelations, and other such phenomena by themselves should not impress us. My staff and I witnessed them occur in various cult, occult, Eastern mystical, and New Age groups we researched.

Many Christians go to a meeting and because the Bible is used or the name of Jesus is mentioned, they accept everything that happens as being from God. Yet, I have researched séances and spiritualist meetings and attended many occult and New Age gatherings where they quoted the Bible, talked about Jesus and even raised their hands to supposedly praise Him. Some actually professed to be Spirit-filled Christians living under His Lordship. Many Hindu gurus and practitioners of black magic and occultism use Scripture and invoke the name of Jesus in an attempt to validate their beliefs and practices.

Bring in the Fortunetellers and Mediums

I am convinced that in many Christian circles mediums, channelers, and fortunetellers could come in, and if they prayed in Jesus' name, or raised their hands to praise Jesus or quoted a few Scriptures and then operated their "gifts," most in attendance would not even know the difference and would believe it was the Holy Spirit.

Johanna Michaelsen believes in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In her book, *The Beautiful Side of Evil*, she warns believers to discern the gifts because, as she says, "We shouldn't be too surprised to find practicing occultists within most of our denominations..."

She goes on to say:

For example, believers with occultic backgrounds which have never been renounced are manifesting mediumistic gifts and techniques which go undiscerned in the atmosphere of ecstatic hoopla which frequently characterizes so many meetings....

Mediumistic gifts can, but do not always, automatically disappear

when one becomes a believer. Mine didn't. I was more psychic than ever...and from what I've seen in many of our meetings, my abilities would have been acclaimed as the gift of "words of knowledge" and "prophecy." It was actually clairvoyance.

It was not until I took the offensive in my ongoing battle against Satan, making a full list of all my sins...renouncing them and all the works and gifts of Satan, and then totally refraining from practicing these things, that these psychic powers faded over a period of months. It has been so with many others whom I've counseled. I truly believe that those with occultic backgrounds should wait a season before seeking and exercising any of the more spectacular gifts of the Spirit until they have matured in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.²⁴

The Occult Connection

I went to a meeting to hear a female evangelist who supposedly operated all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. After hearing her, I was convinced she was either operating in the flesh or by a demonic spirit—definitely not by the Spirit of God.

It was unbelievable how all these alleged born-again, Spirit-filled Christians ran up front to be "slain in the Spirit," have hands laid on them for healing, and to be prophesied over. They played her tapes over and over before going to bed so they could listen to every word she had from the Lord for them. But as I talked to these Christians, I was appalled at their immaturity, their ignorance of God's Word, and their lack of discernment.

The female evangelist, whom they practically worshiped, gave several false prophecies and many unimpressive "miracles." She called forward an older woman and told her that the reason she always had a sad face was because she had a glandular problem. Before praying for her, she assured her that she would go back to her seat healed and with a smile. Again she was wrong, as the sad-faced woman went back to her seat unchanged. Later, I learned that her saddened condition was due to the recent deaths of her husband and son and was not caused by a glandular problem.

It seemed that no matter what problem anyone had, her solution

was for them to go forward, receive a few words of prophecy and a prayer for healing, be “slain in the Spirit,” and everything would be okay—but it wasn’t. I knew in my spirit that this evangelist had been involved in the occult before supposedly becoming a Christian. The same false prophecies, the same Scripture-twisting, and the same spiritual warfare I had encountered while interviewing, researching, and witnessing to fortunetellers and mediums, I experienced in dealing with this evangelist.

I told my research director that if I could get a taped interview with her (something she had refused to do), I could prove that somewhere in her past there was an occult connection. Even though several people had finally realized what I was saying was true and left her group, no one was able or willing to show me the “occult connection” in her background.

Finally, after several years of opposition from members of this group, a woman who heard me on the radio called and said, “I can confirm something for you. I know a former neighbor of this woman and she was, in fact, a fortuneteller before.” I said, “That is what the Holy Spirit impressed on my heart years before. That is what I knew from God’s Word and Spirit, and my research, and now you are finally confirming it.” She nevertheless continued to operate her fortunetelling gift under the guise of Christianity—duping her foolish followers, until the day she died.

Discerning Demonic Counterfeits

A woman from out of state called for help for a man she knew. During our conversation, she began to speak in tongues to impress me with the fact that she had been filled with the Spirit. I discerned her tongues to be counterfeit. She told me she was baptized in the Spirit. I said, “You must really be hungry for God’s Word and reading it every day.” She said, “Oh, no! I don’t have time or the need to read it anymore. Jesus often appears and speaks directly to me now.”

There is an increasing “demonic connection” as more and more supposed Christians are either experiencing or manifesting demonic phenomena. Just as there are tragic consequences for those who become involved in the occult—physically, mentally, emotionally,

and spiritually—so too, I am seeing a pattern of resulting tragedies manifest in the lives of many “Christians” who are ignorantly or purposely becoming involved in occult and New Age techniques, practices, and beliefs being taught in their churches.

In the day and age we live, even if what is said or written seems good on the surface, sounds scriptural, and seems to exalt Jesus, we must remember, the following scriptural accounts:

1. In Luke 4:34, a demon-possessed man cried out to Jesus, “I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”
2. During his temptation of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 4:1-11, Satan quoted Scripture, but subtly twisted its meaning.
3. In Acts 16:16-18, we read an account of a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination. She followed after Paul and kept crying out, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” Paul’s response was to cast the spirit out.

2 Kings 17:33, 41 states:

They feared the Lord and served their own gods according to the custom of the nations from among whom they had been carried away into exile. So while these nations feared the Lord, they also served their idols; their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

The Spirit of Simon the Sorcerer

Many today are seeking to use the Holy Spirit for spiritual power and personal advancement. Acts 8:18-22 records:

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”

The same spirit of Simon is manifest in many believers and Christian leaders today as they are seeking power to perform signs and wonders, not just to advance the Gospel, but for their own ulterior motives.

While Peter would not offer the gift of the Holy Spirit for financial gain, many supposed Christian leaders are more than willing to “sell” Him to gullible followers.

The False Prophet Deceives the World With “Miracles”

How does the False Prophet deceive those who dwell on the earth? Revelation 13:13-14 answers:

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast [Antichrist], telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

Paul tells us about this in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-9:

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,

Revelation 16:13-14 states:

I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

Revelation 19:20 says:

The beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped

his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.

We are living at a time of great deception, and Scripture strongly indicates it is going to accelerate. I am convinced that many Christians who live by the experiential, who follow signs and wonders, who lack discernment, and who do not rightly divide the Word of Truth are being deceived by a strong delusion Paul prophesied would overtake those who reject a love for the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). If so many are being deceived now, how do they expect to stand when the deception gets even more difficult to discern as the very incarnation of Satan comes on the scene, and numerous amazing false miracles, signs, and wonders occur?

A Sobering Warning From Christ

Jesus says in Matthew 7:20, “So then, you will know them by their fruits”—not by their gifts or power or miracles. Satan can counterfeit the gifts of the Spirit, but he cannot duplicate the genuine fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus went on in Matthew 7:21-23 to give one of the most startling warnings in Scripture:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

These people used biblical terminology. They called Him Lord. They supposedly prophesied in His name, performed miracles in His name, and cast out demons in His name, but that is not the validation. As much as we need the gifts of the Spirit in our lives and ministries, that is not the criterion for receiving His approval.

Jesus will not say, “I knew you because you prophesied in My name, because you cast out demons in My name, or because you did miracles in My name.” No! If that is the basis of why you think

He should welcome you into His kingdom, then you may be stunned when He says to you, “I never knew you; depart from Me.”

The requirement is knowing Him personally and, “He who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” That is why I am not impressed by the phenomena that go on. What is really important is that you know the Jesus of the Bible in a real and intimate way, that He is truly Lord of your life, that you are walking in obedience to His Word and Spirit, that you are being conformed to His image, that your heart’s desire is to exalt and glorify Him, that you are bearing fruit for His glory, and the fruit of the Spirit is being manifested in your life!

Former “Headhunters” Seek the Real Thing

I ministered at a national convention in the Himalayas in India to people coming out of backgrounds of Hinduism, Buddhism, idolatry, spiritism, ancestor worship, demon worship, sorcery, witchcraft, and various other forms of mysticism and occultism. These people, some of whom were former witch-doctors and headhunters, did not want to be influenced by mere hype, emotionalism, and imitations of the Holy Spirit—or by any counterfeit techniques.

In some of the mountain villages, many of these people pay a great price to live for Christ. They are forsaken by families and friends, and are spit on, stoned, and beaten with bamboo sticks for witnessing and speaking about Christ. Before I spoke the first time I was told that these people would evaluate everything I said by Scripture—and it had better be accurate. God greatly honored His Word and anointed each service. After every message, hundreds came to the altar where God moved on hearts in a powerful way.

It is ironic to me that so many Christians are settling for inferior and counterfeit experiences and are involving themselves in the beliefs, practices, and techniques that these people renounced when they came to Christ. Having come out of a background of mysticism and occultism, these people are seeking to live a New Testament Christianity and are seeing God move in powerful ways.

Refuse to Settle for Less than the Genuine

There are three main problems with the current trends and phenomena in many Christian circles. First, they are unsupported by God's Word. Second, they are found rooted in the occult, Eastern mysticism, and the New Age movement. Third, the phenomena and "miracles" are blatantly inferior to that which is recorded in Scripture.

I want everything God has, but I refuse to settle for an imitation or a counterfeit. Before I can receive the genuine, I have to be honest. The power does not come from me, nor do I control when or how it operates. Gimmickry must not be tolerated, nor New Age techniques, mind control, or mass hypnosis used. I cannot camouflage the "power of ki/ch'i" (impersonal energy force) as the Holy Spirit. I cannot try to pass off a "spirit guide" as the Holy Spirit. I cannot resort to emotion and hype and say, "This is the Holy Spirit." I cannot push on your head and knock you down or work you into an emotional frenzy and exclaim, "See how God's Spirit is moving." I cannot use psychosomatic healing techniques and claim they are God's supernatural power.

We will not receive the genuine outpouring of His Spirit if we embrace gimmickry, manifestations of flesh, and counterfeits, or utilize any other technique in an attempt to deceive ourselves or others into believing it is the Holy Spirit.

The Lord is calling the body of Christ to integrity! We cannot hide behind a smoke screen of superficial spirituality. We must not settle for anything less than the genuine moving of the Holy Spirit.

From my research into the last days, New Age spirituality, the current trends infiltrating the church, and from my study of God's Word and the witness of His Spirit through many hours of prayer and fasting, I am convinced that we are in the midst of the prophesied apostasy and deception. I also believe we are on the verge of a genuine outpouring of, and empowering by, God's Spirit before Christ's Second Coming. That is why Satan is raising up so much imitation and counterfeit. I believe those who stay faithful to the Jesus of the Bible and the Word of God will be supernaturally empowered by His Spirit. In the midst of persecution we will see the resurrection power of Christ as manifested in the book of Acts and in the prophesies of Joel, chapter 2—as well as an increase of

the imitation and counterfeit.

That is why I am saying, “Beware. Be alert.” That is why I am challenging you to develop discernment by knowing the Word of God and knowing the God of the Word. That is why we must continually seek Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

When the Spirit of God comes upon you, He doesn’t make you fall over, stagger, act like a drunk, be struck dumb, or manifest other bizarre and useless displays of “power.” No. When the Spirit empowers you, He gives you faith, courage, boldness, strength, power, anointing, authority, peace, joy, love, self-control, perseverance, and wisdom, and all that is needed to share the Gospel, be a powerful witness, live a godly life, and accomplish all that He has called you to do.

Seek Him

Those who seek the Lord daily with their whole heart through His Word, prayer, and fasting will know Him. They will not settle for imitation, counterfeit, and inferior power, signs, and wonders. They will walk in discernment, and the true power of the resurrected Christ will be manifested in their lives. Initially their power might not seem as impressive, but in the end it will prove far superior for it is derived from the one true God, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the transforming work of His Holy Spirit.

True revival and the outpouring of God’s Spirit is not the result of man’s manipulation or leaders showing off their supposed power and gifts. It is God’s sovereign intervention in response to those who, in humility and brokenness, seek the Lord with all their hearts —obeying His Word, praying, fasting, and purifying their lives.

True revival will come when believers hunger and thirst for the Jesus of the Bible as a drowning person desires a breath of fresh air. When we desire Him more than anything or anyone else we will sense His presence in our lives and see Him move in powerful ways.

As committed Christians we need to always use discernment, stay true to God’s Word, maintain a testimony for the Jesus of the Bible, and walk in the genuine power of His Spirit.

Apostasy Now!—Coming Soon to a Church Near You

As I watched several “Christian” television programs, I witnessed both subtle and blatant Scripture-twisting as well as unbiblical phenomena. I was grieved in spirit and said to my wife, “It is as though we are seeing right before our eyes the apostate church and harlot of ‘Mystery Babylon’ who will help bring about the temporary reign of the Antichrist.”

The deception, fakery, greed, and immorality surfacing in the body of Christ are just the tip of the iceberg. God is exposing many who are merchandising the Gospel and living in sensuality. Only those walking before Him in truth and integrity will be standing when it is all over!

Judgment Begins with the House of God

The Lord is searching the heart and examining the lifestyle of each pastor, Christian leader, and believer. If you are tolerating anything contrary to His Word or Spirit, now is the time to repent and be faithful in all things. Let all who name His name strive in every way to live and proclaim Biblical Christianity.

1 Peter 4:17 states:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Impending judgment is facing the entire world but first the Lord is dealing with His Church.

As religious shysters are exposed, many Christians are having their eyes opened. Funds once given to fake ministries to build exorbitant kingdoms and personal estates will hopefully be directed to genuine ministries and churches to help get the true Gospel to the entire world before our Lord’s return.

Jude 3-7

In light of increasing deception in the church and world, let's examine several timely verses in the book of Jude. Scripture is printed in bold with my comments in brackets.

Jude 3-7 states:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation,

[I, too, would much rather only write about the wonders of our salvation in Christ.]

I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

[We are living in a day and age when we must boldly stand for the faith—not some “new revelation” or watered-down Gospel.]

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

[They appeared to be ministers and prophets of Christ, but they are ravenous wolves. They profess with their mouths, “Jesus is Lord,” and praise Him with their lips, but their pleasure-oriented lifestyles and exchanging the fruit of the Spirit for the lusts of the flesh, prove they deny Him as Lord in their hearts.]

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

[God's judgment will eventually fall on those who refuse to believe,

pervert His truth, and lead His people astray.]

Jude 8-9

Jude 8 and 9 continues:

Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.

[They are dreamers because all their unbiblical revelations keep them out of touch with the truth and reality of God's Word. They pollute their bodies with all their greed and immorality. They reject authority by refusing to let anyone correct the error of their ways. They arrogantly rant and rave against Satan and pretend to stomp him under their feet.]

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

[The spiritual battle in which believers are ardently engaged can only be won through the Lord Jesus Christ who is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21). As Zechariah 4:6 states: " 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts."]

Jude 10-13

Jude 10-13 goes on to say concerning them:

But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

[Puffed-up and infatuated with imaginary power and authority they, unlike Michael, presume to revile that which they know nothing about. Spiritually arrogant and biblically ignorant, their knowledge is on the instinctual level of animal passion. They are destroyed through the things they practice.]

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain,

[Just as Cain killed his brother Abel, so these false teachers poison their followers by offering them a tainted Gospel.]

and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam,

[Just as Balaam was motivated by greed and personal gain to seduce the children of Israel from pure devotion to the Lord, so these false teachers seduce many from pure devotion to Christ.]

and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

[Their destruction is as sure as Korah's who was judged for his rebellion before the Lord. The days of these false teachers and false prophets are numbered. They will ultimately be exposed and destroyed.]

These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts

[They are controlled by the cravings of their sensual appetites rather than hungering and thirsting for the Lord.]

when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves;

[Instead of feeding their flock the Word of Truth, they merchandise the Gospel for personal gain and to feed their own fleshly desires.]

clouds without water, carried along by winds;

[Just as clouds without rain deceive a parched land into thinking it will get life-giving moisture, so too, these false teachers deceive their followers into thinking they are giving them the genuine Bread from Heaven. They are carried from one new trend or teaching to the next.]

autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam;

[They are spiritually dead now and will soon face the second death in the lake of fire. God exposes the true motives of these false teachers just as the waves turn up debris from the ocean floor and leave it lying on the beach for all to see. Their motivation is not ministry, but pleasure, power, and prosperity.]

wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

[Shooting like meteorites across the sky, they come on the scene and rapidly rise to prominence with their “new revelations” and phenomena, but their glory is usually short-lived. Their eternal destiny is terrifying because they did not heed the scriptural warning that teachers will be judged more strictly—James 3:1.]

Jude 17-20

Jude 17-20 concludes:

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.”

[Claiming to be the spiritual elite, they scoff at God’s Word and fulfill their sensual desires as they tickle the ears of their listeners.]

These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.

[False doctrine, not sound teaching, is what causes division in the church. They speak from their own inspiration because they do not have the Holy Spirit.]

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

[The truth as revealed in God’s Word is our source of strength and what builds our faith. Pray that you may be able to walk in discernment in these last days and in the genuine power of God’s Spirit.]

A Special Challenge to the Body of Christ

Through this book and in many other ways, I have warned about deception and apostasy in the body of Christ and issued a call to return to Biblical Christianity.

Spiritual Junk Food Diet

We are seeing a famine for the Word of God in our generation. A prophet of old had words to say about this very thing. Amos 8:11-12 warns:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and from the north even to the east; they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.”

Children eat all the junk food they can get because it tastes so good. They live in the “now,” so they are not concerned about the resulting consequences of malnutrition and susceptibility to other adverse consequences such as stomachaches, rotten teeth, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

Many Christians are doing the same by living on a spiritual junk food diet. All they want is the excitement and blessing without the responsibility, commitment, and discipline. As a result, they are spiritually malnourished and susceptible to false doctrine.

The lack of knowledge of the Word and the lack of discernment manifested by many “Christian” leaders and their followers is appalling.

I heard someone say the following about one of these teachers who, I think, is very extreme and unbiblical. They said, “I listened hour after hour for over fifty hours to this person’s tapes and I was so full of God’s Word that I was just exploding.” I thought to myself, “All you got filled with was that person’s ‘interpretation’ of God’s

Word.”

If this person had spent those fifty hours in God’s Word, he would have been much better off. Many hold these teachers and prophets in higher esteem than they hold Jesus Christ, and listen to their tapes and read their books more than they study the Bible—and this should not be so.

As much as I hope you will read my books and listen to my audio messages, do so with an open Bible. Do not let my words be the foundation of your spiritual diet. Spend more time in God’s Word. Far more important than anything I say or anyone else says is a commitment from you to get into Scripture and seek the Lord with all your heart.

Zen Koan

There is a thing in Zen Buddhism called a koan. A koan is a paradox or insoluble problem that you meditate on with the intent to derail your rational mind. It works on the principle that a sudden impasse or jolt to the intellect can bring insight.

I believe that many Christian leaders are doing a “Zen koan move” on believers without realizing it. Their Scripture-twisting, double-talk, and taking verses out of context, derails one’s rational thinking. Sometimes after I read or listened to one of their teachings, I thought maybe it was scriptural, until I looked up each verse. It was tedious to do, but when I examined each verse in context, I realized that the Scriptures had been twisted.

Develop Sensitivity and Awareness

Through martial arts training (before the Lord led me out), I had learned to develop my peripheral vision. When sparring, I could focus on my opponent’s eyes or chest area while simultaneously being able to see his hands and feet. This prepared me for whatever attack he might use. I demonstrated this skill when I would go into schools to speak and do self-defense clinics. Looking at students in the center of the audience, I could tell them what other students were doing on both sides.

Many martial artists develop this type of sensitivity and awareness to the degree that they can sense or anticipate their opponent's attack as soon as it begins, and thereby effectively counter the attack. Some go even further. They try to become super-sensitive through meditation and by developing the power of ki or ch'i. Their goal is to be able to think their opponent's thoughts and know his moves before he even begins the attack.

If a martial artist attempts to develop this much sensitivity to defeat an opponent, how much more should we develop a sensitivity and discernment by submission to the Lord so He can guide and direct our lives through His Word and Spirit? The benefit of their mystical discernment is only temporary, while the implications of biblical discernment are eternal.

Seek to be an Expert on God's Word

The responsibility of every Christian is to seek to be an expert on the Word of God. Do not be too quick to accept any new teaching or technique, but examine all teachings, prophecies, revelations, and practices by the Word. When someone adds to, subtracts from, misinterprets, twists, or takes verses out of context to make them conform to their own ideas, you can examine the Scriptures in context and also apply other Scriptures to gain additional light on the subject. This will help you to accurately handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

During my early ministry days, I found myself so absorbed in researching the cults, the occult, and New Age that I spent more time reading books and magazines than I did God's Word, and it began to trouble me. So in 1989, after a time of intense prayer and fasting, and extensive Scripture study, I made a commitment to read His Word and pray three times a day. Except for valuable resource material, I gave most of my books away.

It has proven to be one of the most beneficial decisions I have ever made. Now instead of merely saying what this group, teacher, or "prophet" says, I know what God's Word says—and more importantly, I know the Author.

The pastor of an exciting and biblically balanced charismatic church

in Minnesota shared with me the following when I ministered there:

One day in my quiet time the Lord challenged me to write down my six favorite verses, the ones I could quote by heart. I wrote down Mark 11:24; Philippians 4:13; 4:19; James 4:7; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Corinthians 1:27. After finishing I felt quite good about it. Then He challenged me to write down the subject and context of those verses. To my surprise I could not do it. When I looked them up I found that their meaning in context was entirely different than I had thought.

Right then I determined to always know the context of a verse before I use it. That simple idea has revolutionized my thinking and ministry. You see, I thought the church was in the midst of a “Word movement,” and realized that it was only in the midst of a “verse movement.”

A man writing to me from Australia concerning these “new” teachings and phenomena accurately stated: “When you take the text out of context you are left with con—and that is what is happening in our churches today.”

Be a Berean (Acts 17:11) and evaluate everything said and done in light of God’s Word, and if it is not accurate, reject it. Examine everything that comes into your mind whether it is from radio, television, the Internet, something you read, or from the pulpit. Make certain it is in accord with the Word of God. Let the Word—not your experience; let the Word—not evangelists, teachers, prophets, and apostles; let the Word—not someone’s books and messages—be your foundation.

The book of Revelation repeats five times (concerning the Apostle John or the persecution of end time believers who refuse to compromise) that “the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:2; 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4) are of the utmost importance. Revelation 12:17 indicates that the dragon [Satan] was enraged—not at those who had subjective experiences but—at those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

Joshua was commanded by God to:

Be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (Joshua 1:7-8).

How much more should we totally build our lives on God's Word without turning to the right or to the left to follow extra-biblical and unbiblical revelations and experiences?

George O. Wood states:

I visited in Rome the prison from which Paul is believed to have written 2 Timothy prior to his own execution by Caesar. He would have been lowered into the cell through a hole in the ceiling. In the cold dampness of that dimly lit cell, his words brilliantly reach us today and illuminate our hearts. He closes the letter with a charge to Timothy and all Christian leaders: "PREACH THE WORD" (2 Timothy 4:2)! He does not say, "Preach your own experience. Preach fads. Preach minor things as major things." No! He says: "PREACH THE WORD!" Why does he say that? Because "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:3).[25](#)

"King Saul Move"

I asked a pastor who had been attending various ministers' conferences where they are promoting some blatantly unscriptural teachings and practices, "Why are so many pastors getting involved?" He said, "The church is hurting and this seems to be where all the excitement and growth is at." Such pastors are allowing popular New Age and occult techniques to infiltrate their churches and ministries, and they are seeing some excitement and growth.

They wrongly conclude: "It must be from God. There is so much love and unity. Things are going so well. The apparent blessings and prosperity confirm it is of God." But I say: "It is a deceptive

‘satanic blessing’ and is only temporary.”

Many Christians are involved in what I call a “King Saul move.” King Saul started out obeying the Lord, and God greatly blessed him, until Saul began to disobey and rebel. When God no longer answered his prayers, King Saul went to the medium at Endor for advice. Instead he should have humbled himself, repented, and sought the Lord with all his heart.

Likewise, many Christians today are unwilling to repent and turn from hidden sins and false teachings and turn back to Biblical Christianity with all their hearts. As a result they no longer hear God’s voice and God no longer answers their prayers. They no longer walk in His presence, peace, and power. They become frustrated and discouraged. They think that the Bible is ineffective and the Lord has been unfaithful. They become vulnerable to false teachings and “new revelations” and phenomena that go contrary to the Scriptures. They allow popular New Age and occult techniques to infiltrate their churches and ministries.

With each of these people, you can trace it back to decisions they made or involvements that were against God’s will and in violation of biblical principles. Like Saul who went to the medium at Endor, many of these Christians involve themselves in New Age and occult techniques.

Why settle for an inferior, counterfeit technique when you can have the genuine power of God’s Spirit? You can walk in God’s presence and peace if you seek Him with all your heart. Before the Lord, I call you back to your First Love and to pure, unadulterated devotion to Christ and His Word!

I don’t care how many people tell you to believe something or how many Christian leaders are involved in this new technique or practice. It doesn’t matter how many Christians are jumping on the bandwagon of this “new revelation.” If it is not in accord with God’s Word, reject it.

Over the years I have seen many “spiritual bandwagons” come and go. I have watched churches balloon with growth, excitement, and popularity for a season and then shrivel like a dried-out plant. Many

are a shell of what they were before they welcomed in the false phenomena and practices. Their growth and glory was short-lived.

I have watched too many pastors and Christians get “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). It is so much wiser to stay firmly grounded on the solid rock of God’s Word.

Many Christians have had enough of all the new trends and gimmicks and desire the unadulterated preaching of God’s Word. As a result, many churches proclaiming Biblical Christianity are being filled with spiritually hungry and thirsty believers as they grow both numerically and in the true power and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. God always preserves a faithful remnant.

Satan may be temporarily pouring out his spirit of deception and “blessing” among the apostate church, but God is pouring out among His faithful remnant a much greater anointing and resurrection power of His Spirit—the Spirit of Truth. Those who are His and who stay committed and true to His Word and Spirit will walk in greater power, authority, and victory than ever before.

Belshazzar’s Final Fling

Belshazzar, king of Babylon, had a “final fling” in Daniel chapter 5. So too, the apostate church is having her “final fling.” While a lost and dying world goes to a Christ-less eternity, an excitement-crazed church “parties in the Spirit”—drunk, laughing, falling over, dancing sensually, involving themselves in New Age and occult techniques, and giving “new revelations” and “prophecies” that only encourage their foolish and errant ways. But the party is about to come to an end. The handwriting is on the wall.

Prophecy is being fulfilled. The New World Order (a totalitarian world government) and the deceptive temporary reign of Antichrist and the False Prophet loom on the horizon. Potential worldwide persecution and martyrdom of true believers in Christ draw ever closer. Apostasy accelerates, yet few seem to notice or care. The approaching tribulation of Antichrist’s reign of terror, God’s wrath and judgment, and Christ’s Second Coming are ignored or distorted

by supposed believers in Christ who are too busy partying and having a “good time in the Lord” to realize the signs of the times that are being fulfilled.

Concerning the end times Daniel 12:10 states:

Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.

Belshazzar, who had been drinking wine, was unprepared for the attack of Darius the Mede and was slain by him. So too, a “church” drunk on the “new wine” will also be unprepared for what lies ahead, and will be “slain” with little resistance.

Belshazzar, who had become preoccupied with partying and feeling good, was oblivious to what was about to happen. However, Daniel knew, and so will you know of the impending events that are to come in the last days, if you read the Word and get on your knees in prayer like he did. Doing so will help you have the same discernment and ultimate victory Daniel had.

David Wilkerson states it this way:

The Lord has a people in these confusing times who are not confused. They are so given to Jesus—so in love with Him, so open to the reproof of His Spirit, so separated from the wickedness of this age—that they know the ways and workings of the Holy Spirit. They know what is pure and holy, and what is fleshly and foolish .

... 26

In Daniel chapter 6, Daniel was appointed to leadership in Darius the Mede’s new kingdom. Likewise, those who stay true to the Lord and honor His Word will be the ones whom God will eventually honor, vindicate, and empower.

When King Belshazzar offered Daniel great rewards for giving the interpretation of the handwriting on the wall, Daniel answered the king by saying:

Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else;

however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him (Daniel 5:17).

I have had numerous opportunities throughout the years to compromise. I have been told that if I would just jump on the bandwagon of the current trends, I could have an even greater ministry and tremendous prosperity. My response is similar to Daniel's:

Keep your gifts, keep your popularity. All I want is Jesus Christ. All I want is to walk in obedience to His Word. All I want is to walk in sensitivity and submission to the leading of His Spirit. I don't want anything the world has to offer in that regard. I've had my chance to have that, and I rejected it the way Moses rejected the riches of Egypt! When I gave my life to Christ, I gave up everything for Him. Why should I now—when we are so close to His return—sell Him out and go the convenient, popular way?

You can have your fleeting fame. You can have your temporary excitement and power. You can get involved in apostasy and enjoy the momentary pleasure of committing spiritual adultery. But there will be a time in the very near future when God's "handwriting" will be manifest and your face will grow pale and your knees will shake like Belshazzar's.

Just as no conjurers or diviners could charm Belshazzar's dilemma away, no inner healing, visualization, positive confession, personal prophecy, "new revelation," imitation experience, or counterfeit miracle—not even a unified apostate church bent on world conquest—will be able to deliver you.

One day the popular, wealthy, and influential apostate church that makes those who dwell on earth drunk with the wine of her spiritual adultery will be destroyed. Revelation 17:16-17 gives us the following account:

The ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

In contrast, true believers in Christ—those committed to the testimony of Jesus and obedient to the Word of God—will rule and reign with Christ for all eternity.

A small faithful church may seem less successful in man's eyes than a large compromised one. However, from God's perspective, success is not based on numbers but on faithfulness.

More Blatant Forms of Occultism

A man came into our ministry center requesting information on Halloween. From the conversation I discovered he was in leadership in a church propagating many of the techniques and beliefs I am exposing in this book. I asked, "How can you discern the spirit of occultism in Halloween, but you cannot discern the spirit of occultism that has infiltrated your church?" He had no real answer.

Christians who have become lukewarm and don't know God's Word and lack discernment are getting involved in New Age and occult beliefs and techniques. They will eventually, if they do not repent, get into more unabashed forms of occultism. Unless they turn their hearts back to the Lord, this very mentality and spirit could one day result in their taking the mark of the beast. This is a strong statement, but this gradual but continual undermining of many people's commitment to the Christ of the Bible is resulting in a growing tolerance and acceptance of New Age and occult beliefs and practices.

Many years ago I said that we would one day see churches that once loved the Lord committing spiritual adultery by bringing occultism into the church. We are now seeing it. Many have replaced commitment to the Christ of the Bible and obedience to God's Word and the genuine moving of God's Spirit with occult, New Age techniques and beliefs that they have tried to Christianize and justify.

Initially, what many thought were new insights from God's Word are now becoming more occult in nature, exposing their true source and inspiration.

We see blatant occultism, sexual immorality, lewd dancing, and

other fleshly and demonic manifestations in many churches. Many services will more resemble the revelry around the golden calf in Exodus 32 than a gathering of New Testament Spirit-filled believers. The words written about Aaron in Exodus 32:25 will be true of many pastors:

Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies.

Believers who are participating in New Age and occult beliefs and practices must repent and turn away from them. Return to sound scriptural beliefs and practices—or drift further and further from the truth.

We're Called to Purity—Not Adultery

Many are rising up in Christ's name and seducing His bride into spiritual adultery through false prophecies, pseudo-miracles, and occult phenomena. Deception and error is rampant in the body of Christ.

I feel like Paul, who said in 2 Corinthians 11:2-4:

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

What is one reason in the New Testament why you can divorce your wife? Adultery. Do you know why in the Old Testament that God temporarily separated Himself from Israel? It was because of spiritual adultery—unfaithfulness to Him and His Word.

When the Israelites were obedient and followed the Lord with all their hearts, they had blessings and security. When they were disobedient and followed other gods, they had famines, lost wars,

and eventually went into captivity.

He let Israel (the ten northern tribes) go into Assyrian captivity (722 B.C.), and He let Judah be taken into Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) for one main reason—spiritual adultery.

God created us to have a relationship with Him, to be His bride. When God sees His bride being a prostitute by committing spiritual adultery, it offends and angers Him in the same way it would hurt and anger you if your mate was unfaithful to you.

Hosea says concerning God's people:

For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and they have played the harlot, departing from their God (Hosea 4:12).

The entire book of Hosea deals with Israel's harlotry, God's judgment because of it, and God's forgiveness and restoration. A few other Scriptures which reveal God's displeasure with spiritual adultery are: Leviticus 20:6; Psalm 106:35-40; Jeremiah 3:1-25; Ezekiel 16:1-43; 23:1-49; Revelation 17:1-19:2.

Be Hot or Cold, but Not Lukewarm

In Revelation 3:15-19, the resurrected Christ gives a relevant message for the body of Christ today. He says:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

God is saying to you today that if you want to compromise and be lukewarm, then you can have your temporary pleasure. But He

would rather you serve Him with all your heart. Do not be lukewarm. Do not have that unholy mix (“the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons,” 1 Corinthians 10:21) by using His name and twisting His Word and then seducing His people into New Age spirituality, occultism, and spiritual adultery. Come out from among those who are lukewarm and spiritual prostitutes.

Three Woes

In Matthew 23, Jesus gave several woes. In keeping with that theme, I want to list for you three warnings to the body of Christ that the Lord strongly impressed upon my heart and mind on an occasion of being on my knees before Him in prayer and fasting:

1. Woe to you who replace walking in obedience to God’s Word and receiving the genuine transforming power of His Holy Spirit with psychospiritual techniques, emotionalism, mind control, occult techniques, or pseudo-miracles!
2. Woe to you who attempt to manipulate God or usurp His Lordship by confessing your own will instead of seeking and submitting to His!
3. Woe to you who prophesy falsely and of your own inspiration, or who seek and follow the word of a “prophet” and “new revelations” more than you seek and follow the Word of God!

Repent and return to the Lord with your whole heart. Return to obedience to His Word and Spirit.

Himalayan Convention Provides Valuable Lesson On Discernment

During my first India outreach I spoke at a convention in the Himalayas. To get to the convention site, we had to walk on mountain trails from where we were staying at the orphanage. At night it was so dark we had to use flashlights. The last night of the convention I decided to stay back at the orphanage by myself to spend some extra time in prayer before my final message. When it was time for me to go, I realized it was nearly pitch black with just a little light coming from the moon and stars, so I walked the mountain trail alone with only a small flashlight.

It is amazing how a trail that takes five minutes to walk in the daytime becomes so difficult to walk at night, especially when you are all alone. By then the convention had already started and they were singing. I was supposed to be the featured speaker, so I prayed, “Lord, it is going to be a little bit of an adventure. You have to help me take the correct path to get there on time.”

I had to do two things to keep myself on course. First, I had to be very sensitive to my environment. I had to shine my flashlight onto the path and watch for trees, rocks, a narrow wooden bridge over a mountain stream, and other sign posts I could recognize to make certain I was going the right way. I also had to feel with my feet so I did not fall over any of the many rocks scattered along the way. Second, I had to be very sensitive to listen for the singing to make certain the path I was taking was getting me closer and closer to the convention site. I also had to be sensitive to hear the sound of running water, so I would know I was going over the right mountain stream, confirmed by the other signposts.

Many trails in the mountains intersect each other. It was imperative that I take the correct trail, not only so I could make it to the convention, but also because one wrong turn could cause me to be lost in the Himalayas all night and possibly freeze to death. (It got so cold at night that they provided my son BJ and me with hot water bottles to put on our stomachs in our sleeping bags to help keep us warm. But about 5:00 a.m. we were freezing and had to endure until the sun arose to warm us up.)

So too, today, there are many “intersecting” spiritual teachings, techniques, and experiences. We, therefore, must know the “environment” of God’s Word and must have a sensitivity to, and discernment from, God’s Spirit.

Just as I had to recognize my environment, feel around the paths with my feet for rocks, and shine a flashlight on the trail to get to the right location, we must know God’s Word which “is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). That way, we will follow the right path lest we end up in spiritual chaos.

In the same way that I had to listen for the running water and the singing, we have to be tuned-in and sensitive to God’s Spirit—not to

our own inspiration, not to things we want to interpret as being God's Spirit, and not to a counterfeit voice. That only comes by getting into His Word, getting on our knees in prayer and fasting, and by seeking His will with all our hearts. That is what God is calling the body of Christ to do and is even more crucial in light of the turbulent world we live in today!

Joshua's Challenge to Serve Only the Lord

After Joshua reviewed many of the great things the Lord had done for the people (Joshua 24:1-13), he challenged them to:

Fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:14-15).

It was a time for Joshua and the people of Israel to reflect on where they had been, and how God had delivered and preserved them through the trials of the wilderness and the lands of hostile foreign peoples. They recalled how the Lord drove out all their enemies from the land before them. Joshua reminded the Hebrews, however, of God's holiness; that He is a jealous God who will not put up with spiritual adultery.

He declared:

If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you (Joshua 24:20).

The people committed to Joshua that they would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:21). Joshua then challenged them to "put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel" (Joshua 24:23). That very day Joshua made a covenant with the people concerning their commitment to only serve the Lord (Joshua 24:24-27). Further instruction on this matter comes to us from the book of Samuel:

Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the Lord with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 7:3).

Take the TV Challenge

I have challenged many pastors and believers to turn off their televisions for one month. I tell them, “Don’t watch any television or movies, or listen to Christian audio messages, or read Christian books, or attend any Christian seminars or conferences. And stay off the Internet. Instead of getting filtered scriptural teaching, for just one month read only the Word of God and spend time in prayer and fasting.”

Those who have taken the challenge have frequently informed me that this process has helped them see that many of the current teachings, techniques, and phenomena are not scriptural, and as a result they make a renewed commitment to Biblical Christianity.

When I started into the ministry, I learned that I was not to emulate the great evangelists, or popular preachers, or even my favorite missionaries. Instead of trying to become like them, God showed me that I was to build my life and ministry on His Word and the leading of His Spirit.

So I turned to the Scriptures, and as I did, I prayed: “Lord, show me what characteristics and qualities You require of those who are to serve You. What do YOU want?” He showed me in the lives of the heroes of the faith and also through those who failed. It was by examining their lives that I learned those things that are pleasing to God and those things He finds repulsive.

Throughout my ministry I have prayed, “Lord, don’t let me attempt to manipulate You into what I want or think You should be, but reveal Yourself to me as You are. I want to know You. Make known to me who You are by Your Word and by Your Spirit. Then cause me to submit and be conformed to who You are and what You require of me.” I also ask the Lord to “Enable me to stand for the things You stand for and oppose the things You oppose. Teach me

to love the things You love and hate the things You hate.”

The Lord has transformed me from a rebellious teenager to a man who desires more than anything else in this world to know and please Him. The only explanation for this transformation is that God changed me through the principles in His Word and the power of His Holy Spirit. Had I not spent time in prayer and fasting and studying His Word, my life would have remained unchanged.

Do you want to know if today’s trends and phenomena are of God or not? Then I challenge you to turn off the TV and Internet for one month. Listen to, and read only the Bible in your pursuit of knowing God and His Truth.

You will have a new perspective on life and current trends. You will discern what is from God and what is not. You will be on your way to building your life and ministry on Biblical Christianity. The rewards will be far greater than you can imagine and far superior to any new revelation, teaching, technique, or phenomena. You will walk in greater peace, power, and victory than you ever dreamed possible.

Biblical Christianity begins with:

- knowing the Word;
- knowing the God who inspired that Word;
- and by being empowered by His Holy Spirit.

When these three aspects of the Christian life are operative in you, you will discern deception and be a bold witness for Him and His Truth.

When You Know the Genuine—You Will Spot the Counterfeit

By the time you finish reading this book, there will probably be more false teachings, fads, and phenomena entering the church—most likely “old” forms in “new” garb.

So beware of the subtle errors that so easily capture the hearts and minds of the unsuspecting. Get to know the genuine by studying the Word of God and you will be able to identify the imitation and the

counterfeit and lead others to knowledge of the Truth.

Know the authentic Holy Spirit revealed in Scripture and you will have spiritual discernment to guard your mind and your heart against the corrupt teachings of those who are “deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).

As a watchman, I have sounded the alarm and have warned the body of Christ. I have obeyed what Scripture instructs and what the Holy Spirit has led me to do. The choice is now yours. It is between you and the Lord.

My closing words to you are those of Paul to the Corinthians:

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love (1 Corinthians 16:13-14, nkjv).

Notes

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Bill Rudge Ministries

P.O. Box 108

Sharon, PA 16146

U.S.A.

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